

OUTLINE

The focus of this paper is on the role of the '*first line manager academic*' (FLMA), in the context of Butterfield et al's (2005) assertion that the role of the first line manager is largely unexplored in the broader story of the impact of New Public Management (NPM) on management roles in the public sector, and addressing Mercer's (2009) proposition that there are virtually no studies looking at '*junior academic-managers*' in the HE sector.

The paper will present the findings of research undertaken exploring the nature, characteristics and challenges of FLMA roles in UK business schools, recognising that the findings may have relevance to the wider HE sector in a increasingly managerialist environment.

New Public Management has been characterized broadly as one of "*managers, markets and measurement*" (Ferlie and Steane, 2002), and specifically within HE described as a restricting and dysfunctional attempt at cultural reengineering (Reed and Deem, 2002). NPM implementation leads to greater control, more surveillance of performance and an increase in the numbers of administrators and manager-academics (Deem and Brehony, 2005). Continuing to research its impact is particularly relevant in contemporary HE as, "*Elements of New Managerialism, particularly the search for efficiency, devolution of responsibility to lower levels of the organisation, and concern to bring about cultural change, have permeated UK universities so it is important that all higher education institutions pay attention to how they select and support manager-academics.*" (Deem, 2007).

A number of studies have explored the impact of NPM and NM in the HE sector on the role of the academic manager, including Henkel (1997), Goode and Bagihole (1998), Jackson (1999), Barry, Chandler and Clark (2001), Hellowell and Hancock (2001), Hancock and Hellowell (2003), Smith (2002), Deem and Johnson (2003), Sotirakou (2004), Bryson (2004), Middlehurst (2004), Ogbanna and Harris (2004), Smith and Adams (2008), Bolden et al (2009), McRoy and Gibbs (2009), Floyd and Dimmock (2009), Mercer, (2009), Winter (2009). However, these studies have not necessarily or explicitly examined these concepts at the level of first line management. Taken together, these studies identified a number of challenges associated with the interface of academic work and managerial work,

almost exclusively problematic. These include, Janusian conflict; lack of time and resources to fulfill the role; broad-ranging responsibilities; tensions between academic and management expectations; lack of skills, experience and training; lack of feedback on performance; lack of clarity and acceptance of the role/authority; lack of support; unclear appointment criteria; constraining bureaucracy and inflexible systems; and the specific challenges of managing the performance of other academics. In addition, there are differences between the practices and experiences of manager academics in chartered and statutory universities. These challenges provided themes for the research underpinning this paper in the specific context of the first line manager academic.

Beyond HE, the first line manager role has been subject to a great deal of attention within mainstream business and management academic literature (Hales, 2001; 2005; 2007, Cunningham and Hyman, (1995); Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007, Martins (2009), with more recent debates focussing on the specific nature of what has become known as 'devolved HRM', defined as "*the degree to which HRM practices involve and give responsibility to line managers rather than personnel specialists*" (Brewster and Larsen, 1992). Studies of devolved HRM have focused on the ways in which devolvement takes place; its impact on FLMs, and its overall effectiveness; Renwick (2003); Larsen and Brewster (2003); Cunningham and Hyman (1995); Hales 2005, 2006, 2007; Bond and McCracken, 2005; Goodhew et al, 2007; Purcell and Hutchinson (2007); Martins (2007); Perry and Kulik (2008); Hutchinson and Purcell (2010); Gilbert et al (2011). Questions remain over the ability of front line managers to be effective, and the conditions in which they can be; and given the critical role that they play in influencing employee performance and attitudes, placing the '*care and feeding*' of the organizations' most important assets with people who have possibly received little or no training is a particular concern, (Perry and Kulik, 2008).

In a HE environment, the same issues relating to devolved HR are present, but are overlaid with the specific contextual challenges identified in the studies of academic management in HE referred to earlier.

The paper brings together the strands of HE context, first line management and devolved HR, and reports on the thematic results of three linked descriptive surveys of the views of Deans of UK business schools; FLMA's in UK business schools and HR Directors of UK Universities, where the issues identified in

previous studies of academic managers at different levels are brought together and explored through the perspectives of the three different stakeholder groups, and explicitly articulated at the level of the first line manager academic, with a view to establishing the nature, characteristics and challenges of FLMA roles in business schools – understanding which may have application in the wider HE sector.

Preliminary results confirm that many of the problems identified in previous research studies apply at the level of the FLMA; and that the role is under resourced, poorly defined, inconsistently enacted and supported and perceived in a variety of ways, with the perceptions and differences between chartered and statutory environments an additional complication. In some ways the nature of the university context makes the concept of the management role a contested one, and often secondary in importance to that of the academic role. The challenges of balancing academic and management expectations make the role particularly problematic and the activities associated with 'devolved HR', such as line management, performance management, discipline, leading and managing teams and developing others are highlighted as key areas of challenge and development. The views of the HR Directors in particular suggest the need for significantly more attention on the development of skills and knowledge in these areas. As all groups see the role becoming more important in an increasingly complex, managerialist and competitive HE environment, the implications are significant for future practice and research both within and beyond the specific boundaries of the business school.

(995 words)

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