Management and Leadership in UK Universities: Exploring the Possibilities of Change (0201)

Matt Waring
Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK

The many challenges currently facing the HE sector both nationally and internationally have been subject to considerable scrutiny, research and analysis. The significant body of research that now exists exploring concerns about the current nature of the HE sector offers a variety of alternative ways of *doing HE* . But still the underlying problems persist and academics throughout the sector continue to be frustrated and demoralised by the universities' increasingly corporate approach to management that poses an ongoing challenge to their identities (Clegg 2008; Henkel 2000). Are the recommended solutions to the problems too radical – or not radical enough? Is there an unwillingness to challenge the dominant neoliberal orthodoxy that has led to this state of affairs? Or has the top-down brand of managerialism that characterises many universities become so normalised as to neutralise any opposition, branding it so outlandish as to be out of touch with reality (Clark and Newman 1997).

Whatever the reasons for this lack of change the corporate trajectory that began with the Jarratt Report (1985) continues as universities seek to become ever more efficient, competitive and business-like in their affairs. The massive reorganisation of universities' academic structures from the *republic of scholars* to the *stakeholder organisation* (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007) has led to a growing managerialism (Deem 2007, 1998) and a concomitant weakening of the academic voice (Shattock 2013). Academic departments have been transformed into business units run by management teams focused on corporate targets, working within tight budgetary constraints. To support the corporate agenda there has been a significant expansion of the administrative functions (HR, Marketing, Strategy and Finance, plus newer mission focused units such as Student Experience, Enterprise and International/TNE) and a related increase in the numbers of non-academic staff. The emergence of the blended professional (Whitchurch 2013) – a kind of hybrid role – muddies the water rather but according to HESA statistics in 2013/14 there were 201,535 non-academics compared to 194,245 academics (HESA 2015) employed in UK universities.

Such an imbalance is illustrative of a particularly corporate focus that has resulted in universities becoming both hierarchical in structure and bureaucratic in their processes and procedures. In order to comply with the various regulatory requirements of bodies such as *inter alia* the funding councils and the Quality Assurance Agency - a feature of neoliberal regimes where control is achieved from a distance - universities have developed complex internal audit processes and procedures accordingly. Performance Indicators, target-setting and metrics have become the *lingua franca* of universities in both the pre and post 1992 sector. Academics are subject to regular scrutiny by line managers who are empowered to ensure that individual academic performance is aligned with corporate objectives.

There is an emerging consensus that the current situation is unsustainable, raising, as it does, serious questions concerning the essential purpose of a university. Further, the internal governance and management architecture that has developed in universities reflects an outmoded command and control ideology rooted in the 19th and 20th centuries (Middlehurst 2013). Universities' performance management systems have also been found to be largely ineffective, based as they are around a

short-term principal/agent orthodoxy that is entirely unsuited to a knowledge-based environment traditionally characterised by trust, shared values and long term outcomes (Franco-Santos et al 2014). Unsurprisingly such systems of management fail the test of legitimacy and organisational justice (Stensaker 2013) for many academics. Given that some private sector organisations are re-examining their approach to managing knowledge workers and recognising that such individuals require freedom and autonomy to pursue the creative elements of their work (Rock et al 2014), it is surely right that there are growing calls for a return to collegiality (Burnes et al 2014) in UK universities.

Notions of collegiality can be problematic, evoking for some images of a golden past that never was. Yet the underpinning values of democratic accountability and shared endeavour offer an important starting point and a necessary vehicle to begin to challenge the current model of command and control and to at least offer some hope that things can be done differently.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to that debate and to consider ways of addressing the challenge. Drawing on my previous fieldwork exploring academics' experience of Performance Management, as well as the experience gained over several years as a UCU union branch officer in which I have observed, in both formal and informal settings, a wide variety of management practice, I will argue that reform of line management structures and a re-purposing of the role of the line manager offers the best means of transforming management structures from within.

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