# Working in the Shadow of Hierarchy: the Managerial-Administrative Relationships in a closer perspective.

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**Summary**

To continue to compete in an increasingly competitive world, increasing demands are imposed on higher educational organizations. This has consequences for, among others, the way in which (faculty) academic middle managers and educational administrators cooperate. This paper analyses the characteristics and relationships between the (faculty) academic middle managers and the educational administrators. On the basis of a literature review and thirty-one interviews, four types of managerial-administrative relationships within the faculty will be distinguished. Then, the different forms of cooperation between academic middle managers and educational administrators that arise from these four types of relationships will be discussed. Based on this, five different factors will be identified that are of great importance for a successful cooperation between academic middle managers and educational administrators. The most important conclusion is that universities often lack a fundamentally substantive conversation between academic middle managers and educational administrators about ideas on governance and guidance within the faculty community. The lack of discourse regularly leads to dissatisfaction and causes conflicts and malfunctioning.

**Introduction**

At the regional, national, as well as international level, there is an increasing competition between universities for grants, projects and programs from the European Community and other funding bodies. Moreover, universities are trying to connect the best students to their organization for the regional, national and international training market and take great care in bringing in the most talented researchers and teachers. To this end, they design new courses, specializations and tracks for students, provide additional facilities for researchers and teachers, and form coalitions and alliances with strategic partners. All this with the aim of responding to the changing world of higher education.

To adequately cope with this increasing competition, it is pivotal that governance and management structures within the universities and faculties function well. Strategic interests can differ between the university level and the faculty level. A faculty, for instance, could rank among the best in the world in certain (small) disciplines without it influencing the university strategy. Despite such differences between central university interests and decentralised faculty interests it is important for both levels that the cooperation between academic middle managers and educational administrators is close and effective in order to make strategic choices and to realize these.

**Research method**

This research aims to gain more insight into the managerial-administrative relationships as well as insights into which factors lead to a successful cooperation between these two actors.

In order to identify these relationships and factors, 31 interviews were conducted with both academic middle managers and educational administrators within various faculties and universities in the Netherlands. These interviews centred on the interpersonal relationships, the form of cooperation and the ideas about directing faculty developments.

The interviews give the impression that the developments in university education have led to relationships between academic middle managers and educational administrators being considerably strengthened in recent years. Educational administrators are increasingly held accountable by academic middle managers for the performance of the organization and, correspondingly, for their individual performance. It is expected that this trend will continue in the coming years. On the one hand, this provides an opportunity for educational administrators to more visibly fulfil their leadership role. On the other, the chances of premature departure of dissatisfied educational administrators have sharply increased.

**Results**

Four types of governance emerged from the managerial-administrative relationships found in this research (see Figure 2 @@@).
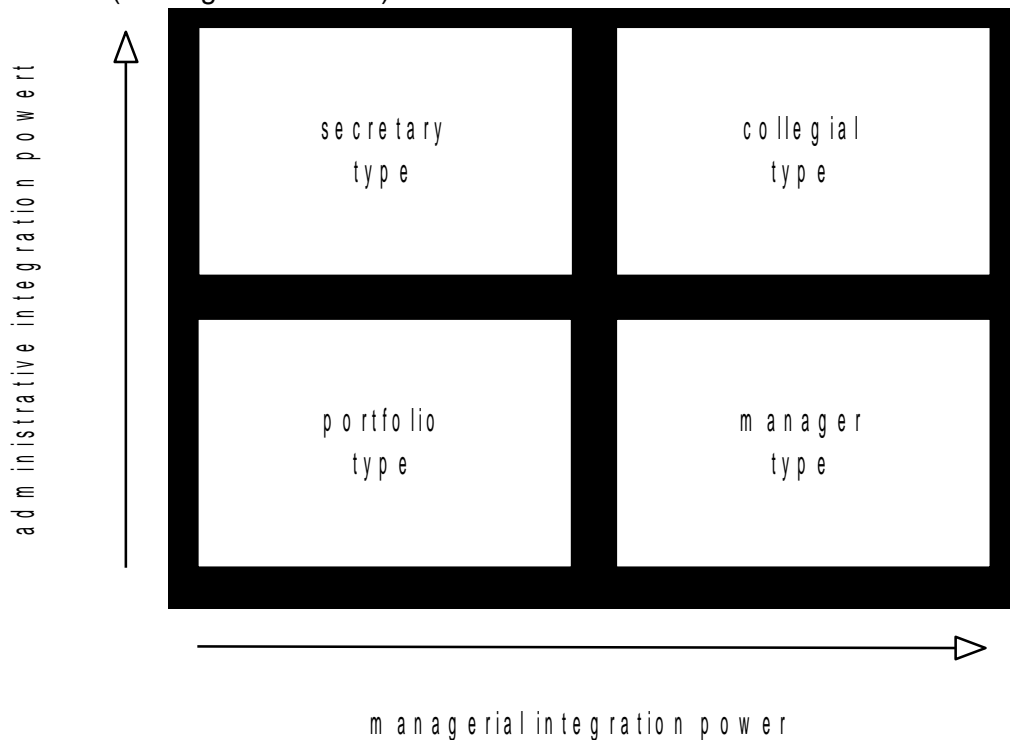


Figure 2 - Four types can be distinguished in the managerial-administrative relationships.

The *portfolio type* focuses on the individual guidance of the members of the board, in which they primarily focus on the policy formulation and implementation of their own portfolio. The role of the administrative top is limited in this type: at most it has a coordinating role in the field of operational management. The advantage of this type is the individual managerial profiling and individual effectiveness of the members of the board. The disadvantage is the compartmentalized governance and the limited attention for the operational management.

The *manager type* is characterized by a more collegial day-to-day management. The management takes responsibility for policy formulation and implementation and also plays an important role in the operational management and coordination. The role of the educational administrator in this type is likewise limited. Often there is a fairly invisible management team. The advantage of this type is a higher degree of managerial integrative capacity. The disadvantage and risk of this type is

an overworked day-to-day management, because they do this management and coordination 'on the side'.

The *collegial type* is characterized by a day-to-day-to-day management that focuses on policy formulation. The responsibility for the policy formulation lies explicitly with the educational administrators top, which also takes responsibility for the operational management and has a coordinating role. The highest educational administrator in this type is 'the boss' and the management team or direction is a discussion partner for the management. The advantage of this type is a high degree of integrative capacity and the opportunities it offers the day-to-day-to-day management to more distinctly orient itself externally. This is possible because the administrative top is relieved of policy implementation, operational management, and coordination.

The *secretary type* is characterized by a strongly governing educational administrative top and a remotely governing day-to-day management. The focus in the governance of policy, operational management and coordination lies with the highest educational administrator and his or her management team or other board members. This type fits well with non-political organizations, in which the management has a primarily monitoring role. The advantage is the effectiveness of the model and the disadvantage is that the model negates the need for political-managerial governance.

Despite the intention of many universities to have the educational administrative top and the managerial-administrative relationships function according to the collegial type, the reality is inflexible. The history, the skills of incumbent managers and the administrative top management, the mutual chemistry between the general management and top management, and the governmental wish to delegate responsibility to the administrative top are determining factors in the extent to which an organization is actually governed according to the collegial type.

**Conclusions**
Based on the interviews and discussions with peer researchers, five factors have been identified that are considered important for successful cooperation between the administrative top and the management.

(1) Be explicit about the (desired) role fulfilment and focus;
(2) Invest in the relationships of the arena;
(3) Focus the energy: make sure the base is in order before breaching 'sexy' topics;
(4) Make consistent choices in the division of tasks and do not choose a hybrid model;
(5) Grow alongside social developments.

The paper includes examples and provides an in-depth analysis of these factors.

In addition, it is striking that academic middle managers and educational administrators rarely converse on the joint functioning and the effectiveness of the division of tasks. Moreover, academic middle managers and educational administrators have differing expectations of the desired task distribution. Not discussing the desired division of tasks and the aspects in which academic middle managers and educational administrators cooperate are potential sources of conflict. That, once there is a conflict, lead to it being as good as impossible to repair the relationships. The departure of members of the educational administrative top is a potential result. In our vision, educational top administrators and academic middle managers should periodically engage in discussions about the policy and operational managerial issues they face. By periodically looking at the effectiveness of the managerial-administrative relationships, a basis is formed for better governance and subsequently a better performing organization.

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