Emerging Concepts of Academic Leadership and their Implications for Intra-institutional Roles and Relationships in Higher Education

MARY HENKEL

A major consequence of the changing relationships between higher education and the State in European countries at the end of the 20th century was that the higher education institution acquired a new significance. In 1980, Becher and Kogan could raise the question whether the institution 'has a substantive existence and a distinct purpose' (p. 63). Musselin (1999; 2001) could assert that in France at the same time it clearly did not. As expectations of higher education multiplied and the modes of its coordination or regulation by the State changed, the institution achieved a quantum leap in status and power. It was obliged radically to review the meaning and organisational implications of self-regulation, as it took on new responsibilities in new arenas under new modes of state regulation.

This article explores some of the implications for the concept of academic leadership in the universities, in particular the extent to which it yielded to the prevailing ideology of management. It considers leadership at the institutional level and at faculty and department level. It draws substantially on two empirical studies of higher education reforms. One was a comprehensive three-country study carried out in England, Norway and Sweden (Bauer et al., 1999; Bleiklie et al., 2000; Henkel, 2000; Kogan & Hanney, 2000); the second was more narrowly focused on the UK Foresight Programme and responses to it in English universities (Henkel et al., 2000). The article will draw chiefly on the English experience.

Changing Demands upon Higher Education Institutions

The changing relationships between the State, the market and higher education created new restrictions and new freedoms for higher education institutions. Higher education had acquired a new political salience, as knowledge and learning were defined as key economic and social drivers. At the same time, governments sought to reduce the State’s share in the sum of resources supplied to higher education institutions (HEIs) and to shift the relationship within which money was allocated towards one of contract. In the context of a general drive in advanced economies towards new public management, HEIs were required to increase their efficiency and to subscribe to various forms of quality assurance. Before long, income maximisation became an institutional imperative driving them to compete both for more restricted and conditional public funding and in a range of markets. Like commercial organisations they had to find ways of
combining participation in global, national, regional and local markets. Unlike commercial organisations, they were also endeavouring to sustain academic values and forms of knowledge.

All these changes made new demands at the institutional level. Institutions had both to mediate new government policies and to generate and manage a new kind of institutional autonomy. In contrast with the reduction in state regulation in continental Europe, British universities saw an increase in direct state intervention. The drive for increased public accountability and public funding policies geared towards linking resource allocation with performance generated convergence. However, in common with their counterparts elsewhere, they were at the same time driven towards divergence. They were under pressure to define more clearly the individual identities, goals or ‘missions’ within which they would at minimum survive and at best innovate and expand in a more competitive environment.

In the face of these demands, they were pulled from without and, to some extent, pushed from within towards the adoption of managerial frameworks for action. Under pressure from government to install principles of management in universities, in 1984 the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) gained the agreement of the then Secretary of State, Keith Joseph, to conduct an efficiency study under its own auspices. The resulting report (Jarratt, 1985) was a strong call for universities to be managed.

**Characteristics of Academic Organisation**

Before examining the implications for institutional leaders, we shall first review briefly the existing nature of academic institutions. They were confronting the challenges with different histories and organisational traditions. The organisation of both universities and, in the UK, polytechnics was subject to stereotyping. By the 1980s both were more complex than was often recognised. The extent to which universities were collegial organisations and polytechnics local government bureaucracies with hierarchical decision-making structures was frequently exaggerated.

Although idealised concepts of the collegium or community of scholars even now retain a strong normative significance among academics, they have long been seen by analysts as inadequate descriptors of university governance. Some questioned the assumptions of internal equality, cooperation, universal and consistent participation and thus of democracy implicit in them (Baldridge, 1971; 1983). Others pointed out the delicate balance in universities between fragmentation and integration and showed how the exponential growth of knowledge, its specialisation and, more recently, the growing tensions between research and teaching functions were intensifying the forces of fragmentation (Clark, 1983; 1991). Others, again, invoked the metaphors of ‘organised anarchy’ (Cohen & March, 1974) and ‘loosely coupled’ systems ‘with their connotations of impermanence, dissolvability and tacitness’ (Weick, 1976).

An alternative set of analyses emphasised the diarchic nature of university governance, between professional bureaucracy and machine bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1983) or between hierarchy and collegium (Becher & Kogan, 1980). However, Becher and Kogan stressed, too, the uncertainties within such a diarchy: ‘academic institutions contain systems of executive roles and systems of
committees. They seldom resolve the overlaps and conflicts between them in any logical way’ (ibid. p. 67).

Well before the ending of the binary line in 1992, polytechnics had gradually been emancipating themselves from local government, as they grew in size and power during the 1970s. They had also built-in internal structures, academic boards, that gave more influence to their academic members. However, although they, too, incorporated more duality into their governance, hierarchy was well entrenched in them and their leadership was less divided than that of the universities. Polytechnic directors had clear authority within their institutions, as well as growing external political power by the end of the 1980s.

Governance came under increased scrutiny in the 1980s in universities and polytechnics. Under the Education Reform Act 1988, polytechnics achieved corporate governance. Their governing bodies were now relatively small executive boards, the majority of whose members represented business interests and expertise. In the university sector, the Jarratt Report strengthened the role of the governing body. ‘Both developments were intended to promote a change in governance culture’ (Bargh et al., 2000) to ensure better management, particularly strategic management, more responsiveness to commercial interests, more entrepreneurial attitudes and, as far as universities were concerned, greater accountability. Accountability came to be perceived in terms of multiple interests in society, as well as the state (ibid.).

The Jarratt Report also focused on internal authority, structures and processes. Vice-Chancellors were to become chief executives. Universities were to be regarded as corporate enterprises, embracing strategic planning and establishing machinery for effective coordination of resource allocation. They were to work to clear objectives and achieve value for money in terms of transparent indicators. The structures within which decisions were made had to be clarified and organisational ambiguity reduced.

These recommendations implied changes in the relationship between the Vice-Chancellor and other academics and in the balance between hierarchy and collegium in academic decision-making. The Vice-Chancellor had still been regarded as primus inter pares, although in Britain this concept was less democratic than in continental Europe. Vice-Chancellors were appointed by a small selection committee representing the governing body and the senate rather than elected by the whole collegium of academics (Becher & Kogan, 1992). Until recently, almost all Vice-Chancellors had tenure until retirement age. However, like their counterparts in continental Europe, they operated by consulting, mediating between and securing the cooperation of academic peers and by exercising influence rather than explicit direction.

Change was also implied in the other form of diarchy, that of academic and what continued to be described as ‘administration’ and administrative leadership, between the Vice-Chancellor and the registrar. All three forms of change were, naturally, closely connected. We shall now consider how and how far they have been realised.

**Institutional Change and Institutional Leadership**

Vice-Chancellors have clearly embraced the role of chief executive. They see themselves as responsible for setting the key values and direction of the university
Middlehurst, 1993; Bargh et al., 2000), as the need to position universities in higher education and also in the wider economy has asserted itself. They see strategic planning and management as key functions. Their work involves important decisions, e.g. about the size of the university, about resource generation and allocation, about institutional acquisition, investment and disposal, about the recruitment and (increasingly differential) reward of academic and other staff, about the creation, closure and merger of departments, and about external roles and relationships. Although, in practice, institutional leaders can be located at various points along the spectrum of leadership styles, a significant number can be defined as transformational leaders (Burns, 1978; Middlehurst, 1993).

It can be argued that the Jarratt report reflected trends already established in the university sector and that the functions of Vice-Chancellors have developed in a process of evolutionary rather than revolutionary change since the 1970s. However, these functions are now significantly different from those of the academic institutions of 30 years ago. Yet the source of recruitment to the role has remained substantially unchanged. Most Vice-Chancellors are academics. They have come from being professors, pro-Vice-Chancellors or deputy-directors in new universities. Only a few were recruited from industry or the civil service (Bargh et al., 2000).

Vice-Chancellors, in consequence, depend on new relationships, new roles and new structures to enable them to carry their own role. Success depends on an institutional capacity and a variety of expertise that go well beyond academic leadership and experience and ability in academic administration. This has implications for the distribution of power, authority and esteem in the university: between the centre and the departments and between academics and other occupational groups.

The broad structural trends are by now fairly familiar in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. The most pervasive are, first, governance of the university by a predominantly lay governing body or Council under a lay chairman. The relationship between the Vice-Chancellor and the Chair of Council is said by Bargh et al. (ibid.) to be crucial and intensive, although the role of the Council itself often seems still to be primarily reactive. Some Vice-Chancellors, however, are now appointed to achieve specific goals set by the governing body. Second is the emergence of senior management teams (SMTs) in which leading policy-making and policy implementation roles are increasingly taken by academics, pro-Vice-Chancellors and sometimes deans, although teams consist of both academic and non-academic managers, such as the registrar and the director of finance. This can partly be understood as the replacement of the diarchy of academic leader and chief administrator by something akin to cabinet government (Baldridge, 1983). A small group of academics is deeply involved in strategy formulation, planning and management. It meets the Vice-Chancellor regularly, formally and informally. Pro-Vice-Chancellors, even in pre-1992 universities, where their term of office is short and their responsibilities are defined relatively flexibly, implement particular policies, as well as helping to formulate them. The SMT is the single most important mechanism through which support for the Vice-Chancellor has been strengthened. However, the dependence of the institutional leadership on specialist and general expertise other than academic has not diminished; quite the contrary. Financial, personnel, estates and general
management, for example, are vital but need to feed into the central strategic work of the leadership rather than to be seen as distinct from it or as simply maintaining the organisation. However, in Britain as elsewhere (Bauer et al., 1999), the position of the registrar has come to be perceived more variably. In some institutions this remains a key role. In others it has disappeared.

In addition to the strategic level, advisory and implementation units have proliferated at the centre, incorporating a diversity of specialist expertise. This means that, while there is a concentration of academic power at the centre of the institution, there is also a more complex intermediary structure linking or lying between the institutional leadership and academics in the basic units. That structure contains a relatively wide range of occupational groups in which academics are a minority. Some units set up for academic support may go beyond that function towards more active steerage of basic units in line with centre-led policies.

Third, there is, however, also a clearer hierarchical line of accountability from the chief executive to the deans of faculties to the heads of departments, who are now also seen as managers. A stronger centre is devolving more responsibilities: a process of centralised decentralisation is taking place (Hoggett, 1991). This is epitomised by devolution of budgetary responsibilities to faculties and/or departments, which in this context acquire additional identities as cost centres, budget centres or resource centres. Universities’ senior managements differ considerably in the scope of the financial management they allow these academic units. Some grant them all the money they earn, in return for which they pay for central services — they are trusted to judge how best to pursue their needs. Others hold most of it at the centre. All retain some resources and resource allocation functions to enable them to control the framework for academic development (for example through the creation and abolition of professorships) and to use financial incentives as modes of steerage.

Fourth, while committees continue to be an important part of the decision-making machinery of HEIs, and the Vice-Chancellor’s chairmanship of the key committees and right to participate in them all remain an essential source of influence, the committee structure has been streamlined and made more integrated. Committees are also more strongly steered by policy papers from the SMT and its advisers. Meanwhile, the senate is no longer the forum in which major academic policies are forged and decided upon, although securing senate approval of policies remains an important part of the Vice-Chancellor’s role.

The developments described not only cut across the concept of the Vice-Chancellor as primus inter pares. They also weaken the sense in which the basic units can be said to be the drivers of academic development policies in the institution.

The Vice-Chancellor now has other relationships through which s/he fulfils the leadership function and other structures than the senate for policy making. The primary relationships are with the SMT and its individual members and with the Chairman of Council. A key function of these relationships is to determine corporate policies for the institution, and so, to some extent, to limit the autonomy of individual basic units.

Meanwhile, other developments contribute to greater inequalities of various kinds in the relationship with academics. Quality assurance policies, their linkage to resource allocation and their influence upon institutional and departmental
reputation play an important role in institutional management. Institutions take increasing care to monitor the performance of basic units and of individuals, so that academics are under constant scrutiny by senior managers. Performance measures are increasingly explicit and transparent. The differential value of academics to their institutions can be and is identified and rewards are allocated accordingly. The context is one of growing insecurity. Not only has academic tenure been abolished but, by 1997, more than one in ten lecturing staff in universities and over one-quarter of all academics were on fixed-term contracts (Dearing, 1997). Staff appraisal systems are symbolic of a more managerial approach to employment policies. They may also be used to encourage, or even coerce, established staff into new conditions of work or early retirement.

Additionally, academic work is more open to scrutiny by administrators as well as by other academics such as senior academic management and heads of department. This can be understood as a form of the ‘visualisation of work’ (Bleiklie et al., 2000). Academic work, when ‘visualised’, ‘becomes accessible to administrators and academic leaders who may evaluate academic efforts and act upon the information ‘from a distance’ without any specialist knowledge about it’ (ibid.).

The intelligence function in the university is increasingly important in an unstable environment. Universities use a variety of mechanisms and personnel within and outside the institution to optimise their information. Academics may still be key sources of intelligence about developments in teaching and research and their potential for exploitation by the university. In the most prestigious institutions they are but in others they may compete with the range of new advisers available to senior management. The resources at the disposal of universities to help drive academic development, as well as providing information, are now more varied.

Other trends have also generated more bureaucratic power. Accountability and quality assurance policies, for example, place a premium on coordination and the development of procedures and regulations and on the amount and flow of internal information. Academics increasingly feel that they are required to meet the needs of administrators rather than vice-versa.

All these developments imply major changes in roles, relationships and power in higher education institutions. However, a persistent theme of the empirical encounters with senior academic managers in recent studies (Bargh et al., 2000; Henkel, 2000; Henkel et al., 2000) is their insistence that academics in the basic units are the drivers of institutional success. There is no substitute for the quality and independence of those academics. Some institutional leaders underline this view by actively encouraging academics to seek power in national academic policy-making forums, so indicating that they welcome academics with power in their own setting. In the most prestigious institutions, the favoured image of the institution is still that of a ‘holding company’ for the basic units (Becher & Kogan, 1980, 1992; Henkel et al., 2000).

Much more widely held is the view that institutional policies will fail unless they are the outcome of active communication between the centre and the departments. There is a strong emphasis among Vice-Chancellors and Pro-Vice-Chancellors upon the iterative nature of policy-making in the institution and upon consultation, negotiation and persuasion in the dynamic between themselves and, particularly, the professors in the basic units. Academic development policies are
bottom-up as well as top-down; indeed, some top-down policies can only be effective if their origins lie in the basic units.

Overall, while the formal role of the Vice-Chancellor is widely understood as that of Chief Executive, the holder continues to rely substantially upon influence and persuasion rather than managerial authority. Normative concepts of collegiality have been superseded not so much by individual authority as by growth of collective academic management and collaboration between senior academics and professional managers. The tools through which Vice-Chancellors can shape the strategies and structures of the organisation have been strengthened, structures have to some extent been clarified and become more hierarchical but universities retain a high degree of organisational complexity and ambiguity.

**Deans and Heads of Departments: a new identity?**

As we explore the implications of change for deans and, particularly, heads of department, some similar themes recur, notably the balance between clarity and ambiguity and hierarchy and community. However, we also look more closely at the relationship between academic and managerial identity. The Jarratt Report's recommendations giving priority to managerial capability over academic leadership extended to deans of faculties and heads of departments. *Prima facie,* at least, they have been taken seriously.

In old universities, academic appointments as heads of department or deans of faculty are commonly for a fixed term, usually four or five years (Farnham, 1997). A distinction is made between the academic award of a professorship and the administrative or, now, managerial role of head of department. Heads of department and even, in some institutions, deans would not necessarily be professors. In new universities, headships of departments are more usually permanent appointments, although, again, they are not necessarily professorial.

Our study (Henkel, 2000) suggests that the more traditional the university, the less likely are individuals to identify themselves as managers, partly because they are also less likely to assume this role permanently.

A minority of our respondents unequivocally rejected any managerial identity, making their beliefs about management clear at the same time. Becoming head of department was an unwelcome, even if temporary, interruption to the narrative of their career, a duty or a ‘community service’.

A professor of physics put his feelings in this way:

I hate to think of myself as someone who spends most of his time in the office and on committees and I try to keep up with research but the real action is with my colleagues. ... I very seldom go to the accelerators, I occasionally go to a conference, and the real work is done by others.

In some contexts, becoming head of department can be more than a distraction. It can mean a disturbance of values and self-esteem. A scientist in another institution considered that what was required of him centred on money and his department’s bottom line.

If I had wanted to run a business, I would have become a businessman. I didn’t become an academic physicist to do this. I am probably not well suited for it.
In contrast, for some, being appointed head of department meant a decisive and positive reconstruction of their identity. A sociologist who had gone to a new university to take up this role now felt he had largely left the pursuit of his discipline behind; being a manager was his prime role. He thought, and, unusually, read, a great deal about it. He had conceived and was carrying through a radical change in his department and was beginning to assume a broader institutional profile.

However, perhaps the most common feeling was ambivalence. Individuals can both deplore and welcome the impacts upon them of these roles. A professor of biochemistry, who became head of his department unexpectedly, conveyed both the unwanted interruption to his research career it involved and his personal satisfaction in meeting the challenges of the job. A head of a humanities department in an old university felt both that his responsibilities had been unacceptably widened and that he would like more power to manage his department.

In all settings there are those who wish to qualify their managerial identity, preferring the concepts of academic leader, academic administrator or perhaps academic manager. The sense that becoming a manager means acquiring not only a new identity but also one that might set apart the individual concerned from colleagues can be an issue. In several institutions it was evident that academics in the basic units perceived a clear distinction, if not opposition, between managers and academics.

Almost all our respondents emphasised their academic identities and the importance to them of a continued engagement with their own discipline. This was understandable on several counts. It could be seen in terms of normal reaction to changes that bring with them uncertainty and possible threats to self-esteem: an adherence to continuities in one’s self image and assumptive world. For the majority who saw their managerial role as temporary, it was also vital to perceptions of their career overall. For some the issue was credibility with the members of their department or faculty.

However, it also reflected a view expressed at all levels of management in universities that these roles must be academic as well as managerial. A dean in a new university was ambivalent about describing herself as a manager. However, she believed it was not only essential to her role that she was both an academic and a manager but also inevitable that these two roles were in tension. A dean of a social sciences faculty in an old university was clear that he was a middle manager. He was equally clear that universities must be run by academics:

You must have people who empathise with the values of people in universities and who know how hard it is to do research — how easy it is to crumple and wither ... you must manage on the basis of trust and not on the basis of control.

Towards New Concepts of Academic Leadership

It can be argued that new concepts of academic leadership were being forged out of the belief that deans and heads of department must be both academics and managers and out of the tensions or conflicts inherent in that belief: between
individual and collective concerns, hierarchy and community, control and support, change and continuity.

Conflicting demands were of three main kinds: those of academic and administrative work; the flow of external demands or crises competing with strategic responsibilities; and the desire to nurture individuals as against the need to change their departments.

Being head of department and, even more, dean, could, if you allowed it to, 'take over your life'. A few people quantified the time taken by their management responsibilities, in each case at over 50% of their time. The problems of combining them with research were a frequent cause of concern.

At one level the experience seemed to be largely one of external pressures: 'it is difficult to be precise but there is a constant flow of demands.' (an economist); 'we are inundated by requests for information' (the head of a physics department). At the same time, he felt that they were not consulted on issues that mattered to them.

There was also a widely held view that while heads of department and deans, too, now had more accountability to the centre, their power was not commensurate. A particular source of tension was between university control of appointments and departments' freedom to determine how best to manage their budget to recruit towards their own goals. Centralised decentralisation was a source of ambiguity as much as of clarification.

Heads of department, for their part, tended to be the target of criticism from more senior academic managers and administrators for failure to take a longer term, strategic approach to their job. A social scientist head of department, who had taken long term decisions about his department, acknowledged the problem, but in the context of a discussion of uncertainty and organisational ambiguity.

I think to manage with uncertainty is very difficult. People always want answers — and to hang onto the unknowingness is quite difficult ... at the same time, to know when to act, when circumstances are auspicious, is very difficult. The pressure is often to act.

However, his and other accounts make it clear that heads of department do accept that they have a strategic role. While this view was more evident in those who had permanent or quasi-permanent headships, it was not confined to them.

Heads of department had initiated major reviews of their degree programmes and of approaches to teaching and learning, as their departments adjusted to the increase in student numbers and the growing emphasis on preparation of students for the labour market. They were addressing long term strategies to improve their research performance. They were endeavouring to find workable principles for the deployment of departmental resources, particularly staff, as new demands imposed new priorities, new burdens and new opportunities.

Developing or sustaining the academic strength of the department was central in many academic managers' perceptions of their role. This was particularly evident amongst heads of department in new universities getting to grips with their new status. A head of economics managing a department of about 50 staff spoke of how he had to revitalise the identity of his department, which had centred on the strength of its undergraduate degree.
I’m not going to have a moribund department ... where what was OK for me and others continues to be the norm. Times have changed, so one has to concentrate on research output, in order to be able to help younger colleagues to develop their careers. We also want to do it because we want to maintain a reputation ... we will want to attract quality students.

A head of social sciences had refashioned the department from an applied and vocational to an academic orientation. His role entailed continuing to work out the implications of this change in the department and in the university for his staff and helping them to manage them.

If people don’t want to do research and they do other things well, that is all right, though we have brought on some people who were non-active researchers. The important thing is to be clear about what people should be doing. It is also important that those people who do not do research ... realise that research is very hard and those people are under enormous pressure ... People who are not researchers, I expect to be damned good teachers and taking a lead in that.

You have to be absolutely open and honest about it. The good of the department depends on the Research Assessment Exercise. ... [but] I also tell the researchers that without teaching, their main business, they would be out on their ear. They need to contribute to the operation of the whole department and not just disappear.

Demands external to the department or the university itself might well have been the trigger for many initiatives. External quality assessments had multiple functions in the lives of academic managers: instruments of departmental review, development and, sometimes, strategic change, sources of stress, high profile ways in which their performance would be measured. Such external pressures could be enabling in a profession where, even with the advent of more structure, individual autonomy remained a key value. Heads of department had otherwise to rely largely upon encouragement, personal authority and leadership in advancing change, although professorial status made a difference to individuals’ sense of authority.

Many heads spoke of the satisfaction they gained from observing and facilitating the development of their junior colleagues. Staff career development was perceived as an important and welcome aspect of their role. It was perhaps more akin to traditional conceptions of a head of department’s role. It could, at least sometimes, be integrated into a broader set of departmental strategies. For a professorial head ‘the nurturing of the individual careers of colleagues creates a corporate advance’ which brings with it public success in, for example, external quality assessments.

This kind of synergy was not always easily achievable. Policies were reshaping career trajectories, particularly in the new universities. A head of economics reflected that finding ways in which staff could ‘develop their careers and develop job satisfaction’ was becoming more difficult as far as teaching was concerned. It was probably from research that staff would now get their career enhancement.
A professorial head in an old university, who also found staff appraisal one of the most satisfying and important aspects of his job, found it frustrating as well. He would have liked to make more radical reallocations of his staff, to encourage staff who were not successful researchers but who were excellent teachers to close down their research and take more responsibilities for teaching. However, university promotions policies made it impossible to provide such staff with any incentives.

But there were also more inherent contradictions in the job between nurturing individual aspirations and achieving change in departments. Heads of department and deans had, as we have seen, to confront the idea that their job was not just to support academic staff. A dean, strongly committed to management by trust rather than by control, described how he nevertheless controlled some staff tightly and had persuaded some to take early retirement. He articulated what he believed was now involved in academic leadership. Academic leaders had to have vision and evolve strategies for maintaining key values such as sustaining good teaching and good research in the face of policies that were tending to fragment them. They must be able to motivate, and create a climate in which others wanted to take on institutional tasks. They also had to establish a framework of expectation in which individuals knew that if their standards of work were not high enough they would be required to account for themselves.

In other words, those like himself in a middle management role had to work to reconcile ‘managerial values with professional values’. Management wants things done but it has to take into account that ‘the doing is in the hands of people operating in a professional milieu, where their attachment to the university is much weaker than their attachment to a discipline.’ However, he thought that it was possible to make a contemporary reality of collegialism by making the effort to combine the two sets of values.

A number of those in comparable positions appeared strongly committed to change in the culture of their departments or faculties. Most emphasised the importance to them of cohesion and cooperation. However, they were seeking to realise it in institutions where old concepts of academic community and collegialism that relied on equality of status and implicit adaptation to the strengths and weaknesses of colleagues were disappearing. Now there were more explicit performance criteria and more explicit divisions of labour and responsibility that in some cases were generating more hierarchical roles in departments, directors of graduate studies or even of research. This was part of a shift towards a more collective professionalism, a sense that good research and good teaching were collective as well as individual responsibilities. It also represented a shift towards the belief in higher education institutions that department and university cultures were a product of management, as well as of shared traditions of academic values.

Conclusion

The language and practices of management have undoubtedly taken a hold in academic institutions but not to the exclusion of academic identities or academic leadership. For most academic leaders it has meant finding ways to move between two worlds. They have had radically to reshape rather than wholly reconstruct their identities. At all levels they are seeking to incorporate managerial thinking
into enlarged concepts of academic leadership that can address the new demands upon them. As yet, this is a slow and fairly uncertain process. There is as yet little systematic training for academic leadership. There are no ‘scripts’ for these roles, and the burden is largely on the individual to define and find their ‘texts’ for themselves (Henkel, 2000).

On the face of it the structural framework of authority and accountability in HEIs is clearer. At the centre of the university, collective academic decision-making has been strengthened and streamlined, and the range of advice and support for the senior management team and for the basic units has been substantially extended. There is therefore institutional recognition of the new level of functional complexity of universities.

The authority of the Vice-Chancellor has been enhanced by these changes but even so the pulls between centralisation and decentralisation, between control and trust of the basic units are strong. Negotiation, iteration and influence remain important for successful leadership. The position of academic leaders in the basic units is yet more uncertain. The authority and value of these basic units are no longer taken for granted, and while the role of the head of department has expanded, there is wide variation in how heads experience the balance between institutional demands and institutional supports.

However, it seems that academic leaders at all levels are agreed that, while HEIs need stronger collective direction, that cannot be achieved through banishing organisational ambiguity.

REFERENCES


