Some Implications of a Diversifying Workforce for Governance and Management

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Abstract

This paper suggests that as university missions have adapted to accommodate major developments associated with, for instance, mass higher education and internationalisation agendas, university workforces have diversified. They now, for instance, incorporate practitioners in areas such as health and social care, and professional staff who support activities as diverse as widening participation, e-learning and business partnership. This in turn has implications for higher education governance and management structures and processes. Consideration is given to variables likely to affect institutional responses to such changes, and some suggestions are made as to possible ways forward in addressing the interests of an expanding range of professional groupings and stakeholders, as well as those of institutions as a whole. These are likely to involve the development of more flexible organisational frameworks in relation to, for instance reward and incentive mechanisms and career pathways.

Introduction

University governance, its relationship with institutional management processes, and the variables that affect appropriate governance mechanisms and frameworks, have received considerable attention in recent years (for instance Deem, Hillyard and Reed 2007; Maassen 2003; Marginson and Considine 2000; Shattock 2002, 2006). This is partly a result of the

higher profile placed by governments on institutional accountability and the associated quality assessment processes. A debate has ensued around shifts of emphasis between 'corporate' approaches that give priority to the development of institutional strategy via executive decision making by senior management teams; and collegial approaches that give primacy to disciplinary considerations, academic autonomy and collective decision making. Traditionally, in the UK, this distinction has been maintained in 'bicameral' structures that give the Academic Senate or Board responsibility for academic affairs, and the Governing Body or Council responsibility for governance and management. However, as Shattock (2006) has explored, this division of responsibilities has come under pressure, with governing bodies being expected increasingly to demonstrate an overarching role, implying oversight of academic interests insofar as they relate to 'corporate' strategy. This challenges what is perceived as the sovereignty of academics in relation to decisions affecting them, notwithstanding potential conflicts of interest.

In practice, where an institution sits on the 'corporate'/'collegiate' spectrum depends on key variables such as its national context, constitution, traditions and influence of its Vice-Chancellor and senior colleagues. At one extreme are institutions that are able to exercise a high degree of autonomy, and therefore have considerable freedom of choice over the nature of appointments, grading, job titles and systems of reward and recognition. At the other end of the spectrum are institutions for whom decisions are subject to clear parameters laid down by the appropriate national ministry. Thus in France, the relevant national committees for each subject discipline continue to exert influence upon professorial appointments (Musselin 2010). In what might be seen as a more autonomous environment, the USA, the American Association of University Professors has for several decades exercised a steering influence upon the definition of academic tenure and professorial rankings. In between these extremes there are many variants. However, less attention has been paid to the impact of diversifying

institutional communities as a variable influencing governance or management processes and where a specific institution might sit on the spectrum described above. Furthermore, institutional leaders have different perceptions of the levels of freedom and autonomy available to them in relation to their national system. They may also differ in the extent to which they feel able to accommodate changing circumstance and needs, and be hesitant to optimise whatever freedom they have, particularly in relation to how far they are prepared to challenge the status quo. By and large, institutions tend to conform to the norms of their system, and it is difficult to find examples of widespread deviation.

Maassen (2003, p. 32) defines governance as being "about the frameworks in which universities and colleges manage themselves and about the processes and structures used to achieve the intended outcomes". Also implicit in such processes and structures is the safeguarding of legal and constitutional requirements. By contrast, 'management' implies the operational implementation of decisions day-to-day, including the allocation of financial and human resources in support of institutional strategy (whether this is agreed through mechanisms that veer more towards the 'corporate' or the 'collegial'). This paper starts from the premise that the relationship between governance and management is an iterative one, reworked on a daily basis by those with responsibilities for institutional activity from the most senior managers to those leading research and teaching teams, following Shattock's suggestion that:

> "Managing good governance in a university setting means ensuring that governance at all levels in the institution works well, that all interlocking parts connect smoothly and that the processes combine to deliver an organisational culture which is robust, flexible and willing to take decisions on trust where pressures of timing demand it." (Shattock 2006, p. 4).

While in the past, governance structures have assumed a relatively stable workforce with common assumptions about, for instance rewards and incentives, career pathways, and even daily tasks, this is no longer the case. As university missions have diversified, so too have the profiles of staff, both academic and professional, who comprise institutional communities. This is illustrated by:

- The incorporation of practitioner subjects such as health and social care, with different traditions involving teaching in practice settings, professional body loyalties and traditions of applied research.

- Diversification within traditional cadres of academic staff to incorporate groups with specialist expertise in, for instance, curriculum innovation and new methods of electronic delivery.

- The recruitment of professionals who support broadly based institutional projects such as the student experience, community partnership and learning support.

In practice, significant numbers of professional staff on 'non-academic' contracts are likely to have academic credentials and experience (Whitchurch 2008; 2009), and academic staff may well have management responsibilities in relation to multi-professional teams, in areas such as learning partnerships and research enterprise.

This paper, therefore, explores the implications of mutations in the workforce against the background of contemporary understandings of governance and management, and goes on to offer some suggestions as to ways in which more adaptive processes might be developed in order to accommodate the needs and aspirations of diversifying academic and professional groupings. For instance, the increasingly common practice of establishing multi-professional teams to work on specific projects creates issues of comparability, as suggested by the following learning support manager whose team focused specifically on non-traditional and international students:

"There is a difficult leadership role in integrating and managing the staff … who are a combined group of academic and administrative staff undertaking similar work with different working conditions and entitlements … the [role] requires a consultative approach …"   Such a "consultative approach" reflects Shattock's concept of "shared governance" as "partnership between the corporate and the collegial approaches, and where a sense of common purpose informs the balance of the relationship" (Shattock 2002, p. 243).

The paper draws on two projects undertaken for the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) on changing professional roles and identities (Whitchurch 2008; Whitchurch and Law 2010), as well as on the contribution of twelve international authors to a monograph entitled *Academic and Professional Identities in Higher Education: The Challenges of a Diversifying Workforce* (Gordon and Whitchurch 2010). In the LFHE studies, data was gathered from over 70 interviews with respondents from five institutions in the UK, two in the US and two in Australia, together with 73 respondents to an online questionnaire, including people working in areas such as learning partnerships and research enterprise (Whitchurch 2008, 2010). The paper also draws on the narratives of authors from the UK, France, US, Australia, South Africa and Japan (Gordon and Whitchurch 2010) reviewing changes occurring to academic and professional identities across national boundaries and types of institution.

A diversifying workforce

Within the category of 'academic professionals', the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2005; 2010) demonstrates that only 52% of academic staff, who in turn comprise 46.5% of the total higher education workforce in the UK, continue to undertake both teaching and research, traditionally seen as essential elements of 'being an academic'. Furthermore, 17% of academic staff are described as grades 'other than' than professor, senior lecturer or

lecturer, illustrating the difficulty of characterising emergent staff categories. These may include, for instance, teaching fellows, learning support staff, and casual appointments. Furthermore, in the UK, there has been an increase in professional staff, managers and technical staff in the five years to 2009, with a corresponding reduction in clerical and manual staff. This can be accounted for by an increase of appointments to support, for instance, widening participation initiatives, web-based learning, research enterprise and business and community partnership, as shown in the following figures:

Table 1: Percentages of staff in different categories 2003/4 and 2008/9

[Insert Table 1 here]

(Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency 2005; 2010)

Moreover, there is increasing contractual, as well as disciplinary and functional diversity. Currently in the UK, 64% of academic staff are on open-ended, permanent contracts, with 36% on part-time contracts. More than a third are on fixed term contracts, and this includes substantive appointments as well as contract researchers. Thus the UK would appear to reflect a trend in the US where less than 50% of academic staff are now on tenure track appointments. In addition, there has been an increase in people appointed on fractional contracts relating to specific programmes or projects. If one programme or project terminates, then the appointment relating to that component comes to an end. In this situation, an individual may even work for different institutions on different days of the week. Therefore a range of different circumstances exist (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2008/9), and identities are forming in spaces that incorporate, for instance, professional, practitioner, organisational and managerial, as well as disciplinary interests, and in extended locations such as external agencies and partners, outreach and offshore sites. Spaces may also be virtual or

web-based, and 'residency' be multiple, overlapping, permanent or provisional. Thus, diversification of the workforce is occurring over time and also spatially, on a number of levels.

Such changes have stimulated an intermingling of academic and professional activity within traditional organisational structures. Not only do significant numbers of professional staff have academic credentials and experience, but academic staff who are assigned a co-ordinating role in an area such as widening participation may have management responsibilities, and develop interests in Mode 2 forms of institutional research (Gibbons, Limoges et al 1994). As a result, what Whitchurch has termed a "Third Space" has emerged between academic and professional spheres, in which mainstream academic and professional functions have converged and coalesced in broadly based projects such as the student experience, learning support and community partnership. At the same time, new forms of "blended" role have developed within this space (Whitchurch 2008; 2009) (Figure 1):

Figure 1: The Emergence of *Third Space* between Professional and Academic Spheres of
Activity

[Insert Figure 1 here]

(Diagram adapted from Whitchurch, C. "Shifting identities and blurring boundaries: The emergence of *Third Space* professionals in UK higher education." *Higher Education Quarterly* 62(4), 377-396, 2008. Reproduced with permission of Blackwell Publishing Ltd.)

Contemporary governance and management

As a result of the changes described above, contemporary management teams are challenged to develop and deliver institutional strategy at a time when relationships between colleagues within and outside the institution are increasingly complex, and institutional 'knowledge' widely dispersed. In order to make sound decisions, they need to find a way of tapping into this knowledge, with implications for lines of communication and intelligence-gathering. As institutions are drawn into greater interdependence with their communities, they are obliged to recognise a more complex set of roles, tasks and opportunities for their staff. A proliferation of stakeholders and interest groups in higher education has also created pressures on traditional structures and processes.

At the same time, governance and management structures have tended to become flatter as a result of devolved organisational responsibilities, and this has generated:

- A less clear division between managers and managed, with more people becoming involved in 'management'.

- Interaction between staff at different levels of seniority, so that an individual might lead a team in one setting, and be managed by another member of that team in another setting.

- Management experience earlier in people's careers, for instance in project or research teams.

- An increasing significance for information networks, inside and outside the university, on which innovative developments often depend, and which are likely to be wider and more complex than formal, hierarchical communication channels.

Larsen, Maassen and Stensaker point to a "growing gap between management intentions and academic realities", and they suggest that "the legitimacy of the decision-making structures within the institution is perhaps the key element in creating and maintaining trust and acceptance for decisions taken" (Larsen, Maassen and Stensaker 2009, pp. 54-55). These suggestions might be said to reflect, at local level, the concept of "network governance" expounded by Ferlie, Musselin and Andresani (2008), which offers "a greater range of actors and interactions… a shift from vertical to lateral management… organizational learning, joint problem recognition and solving capacity and best practice…" (pp. 337-338), all of which "acknowledge the specificity of each institution" (p. 341). Likewise, Benington (2010, forthcoming) points to "networked community governance", representing a move away from mechanistic language, so that governance becomes a "complex inter-connected polycentric system rather than a machine controlled by cogs and levers", in ways that can more easily respond to nuances of policy. Thus, "competing values and interests can be expressed and debated in a deliberative democratic process, by which the question of what constitutes value is established dialectically".

Larsen, Maassen and Stensaker (2009, pp. 45-47) describe the emergence of four basic "dilemmas" or tensions in contemporary institutions between:

- Representative democracy and organisational effectiveness.

- Integrated and dual management structures.

- Internal and external influences on institutional decision-making.

- Centralisation and decentralisation of decision-making.

Dilemmas such as these arise partly from changing (and sometimes disparate) expectations of governments, institutions and individuals. The studies on which this paper draws noted corresponding stresses, including:

- An increased inter-dependence of higher education institutions with other stakeholders such as regional development agencies, leading to ongoing negotiation and adjustment of policy, often at short notice.

- The overlaying of formal, hierarchical lines of authority with informal, lateral communication networks between professional peers.

- Varying 'rhythms' between the activities of a broadening range of stakeholders, particularly in relation to, for instance, timescales for decision-making and budgetary constraints.

- The difficulty of achieving a strategic overview of the interests of a range of internal and external parties.

- The potential for increased risk if decision-making bodies do not appreciate the implications of new forms of activity and staff profiles.

- A consequent need for members of decision-making bodies to receive appropriate briefing and training, particularly in relation to ongoing risk assessment.

Although 'softer' forms of governance, as described by all the authors quoted above, would appear to make possible flexible and facilitative responses by senior management teams, they also "present major challenges in terms of both steering (how to sustain clear strategic direction) and accountability (how to account to multiple stakeholders, with very different mandates)" (Benington forthcoming). This is demonstrated in the following section.

Challenges presented by a diversifying workforce

Decisions about employment conditions are likely to reside with the governing body in bicameral governance arrangements. However, in devolved structures local managers may have delegated authority for their academic and functional areas, subject to adherence to agreed institutional policies and procedures. Adaptation of the system is likely to depend

upon relationships up and down formal lines of authority and the extent of the influence of governing bodies and their members. Contemporary employment policies and practices require governing bodies to ensure that procedures are enacted in ways that appear equitable, transparent and appropriate by those with responsibilities for staff. This is likely to involve consideration of, for instance:

- To what extent existing policies and procedures are fit for purpose.

- Whether they enable the institution to pursue agreed strategic objectives, for instance on knowledge transfer and exchange, internationalisation, widening participation, the effectiveness of information technology, or in any other area of professional services.

The situation is also complicated by the fact that day-to-day issues often reflect inherent tensions, for instance:

- Some academic staff flourish in entrepreneurial activities such as spin-out and research enterprise, whereas others focus on teaching and/or have a more 'public service' orientation, creating comparability issues in relation to, for instance, progression and promotion.

- Some professional staff have become more specialised in terms of their expertise, for instance acquiring skills in project management or marketing, while others are increasingly involved in more academic areas such as learning support.

- Despite a "culture of complaint", higher education offers 'softer' benefits such as campus environments and sports facilities, as well as intrinsic professional motivations. It therefore remains attractive as an employment sector (Locke and Bennion, 2010, forthcoming).

- Even though academic staff may feel over-burdened with regulatory obligations, they are sometimes reluctant to delegate these to professional colleagues.

Two examples serve to illustrate some of the complexities and unintended consequences of employees who do not fall into mainstream academic or professional employment contracts. The first is someone who at any one time worked on two or more institutional projects, for which they were employed on separate contracts:

> "Human resources systems aren't structured for me, and there's not many like me, and they hate me... I cause them dilemmas the whole time because I've usually got three or four contracts going… starting and ending at different dates, and doing different work, and working for different areas, and that's been on-going for four years. So I'm the human resources department's nightmare, it has to be said."

The work involved a mix of what might be seen as 'academic' and 'non-academic' activity, including programme development for online and offshore teaching, tutoring and managing an organisational restructuring project. Although this person had been offered a mainstream academic contract, it was more advantageous financially for them to continue on a consultancy basis. Although this involved more risk, they also felt that it gave them more options, and because they were known to have high-level skills, when one project finished they were usually invited to take on another:

> "The interesting thing is that most areas try to retain you… when they know you can actually do the job within the parameters, they want to keep you, and I've discovered that I'm better in a project type role, rather than a maintenance role".

From the university's point of view there appeared to be barriers to creating a 'hybrid' role on an individual basis for this person, although this would have regularised their position and created more security on both sides. One possibility would have been, as suggested by the individual themselves, "to have a position that allowed you to maybe have modules in your position description, that you could fill with project activity…" It may be, therefore, that institutions will in future wish to consider how such generic project management roles,

crossing employment categories and professional boundaries, might be incorporated on an ongoing basis.

Pressures upon institutional managers for modification to, or adaptation of, existing, standard procedures may initially be represented as an exceptional case. When the scale moves from an occasional or individual case to a situation that involves groups or recurrent cases, the need for some adaptation to standard procedures increases. As well as the type of example given above that allows for mixed roles, for instance between academic and entrepreneurial or community commitments, such adaptation of standard practices might include, for instance, acceptance of the concept of market salaries for a specific need, or a special contractual provision to attract practitioners in certain fields. Often a problem is expressed in terms of motivation and reward, rather than in terms of a possible solution. In such circumstances, managers will wish to scope the scale and nature of the problem, as well as the benefits and limitations associated with potential solutions. Where the issue is not unique it often means that broader discussions and explorations will be required, including some assessment of the implications of possible changes. In the employment domain, this process is likely to involve unions as a key set of stakeholders.

An example of a skills development manager in an inner city university serving a mass market illustrates how new forms of activity can be threatened by a lack of flexibility in standard systems. Their work included teaching and tutoring, curriculum design, research into programme outcomes, developing community relations, and managing staff in a skills centre. However, their position demonstrated the disparity between institutional policy and practice in widening participation in that the programme depended on 'casual' staff, that is, those paid on an hourly rate rather than having formal contracts of employment with the institution. Thus, the development of academic skills in a widening participation programme was

implicitly accorded lower status than other 'mainstream' disciplines. As a result, staff had no security and would at the same time be likely to be seeking alternative, permanent employment. The programme was therefore susceptible to sudden staff changes, which were potentially disruptive and threatened the quality of what could be delivered. This in turn risked an important element of the institution's mission to widen participation, its relations with local employers, and the goodwill of funding agencies.

Another example illustrates the disconnect that can occur between formal responsibilities for and informal understandings of 'management' by those working in multi-professional teams, to which members contribute different types of expertise which they share as colleagues to achieve outcomes and if necessary develop solutions to problems. Thus, an individual working in institutional research, who was responsible for a major segment of the unit's work, displayed considerable diffidence about 'management' as such:

> "… in the sense that I manage [my team] I think it's only in name. They ask me for time off, but in terms of management, it's a weird thing for me to come into. I feel uncomfortable thinking of myself as [a] boss even though I am. I don't consider myself [their] boss, as much as just a senior colleague who is guiding [them]".

And, conversely:

> "my management style reflects how I like to be managed, which is with autonomy… I don't expect someone to come in poking around… I prefer having guidance available if I need it".

Their relationship to individual members of the team was reflected in the way they conducted the annual staff review process:

> "I say look, here's an opportunity for you to think about how you want to do things differently, and how you can stretch… what can we do for you to make this fresh?"

This 'light touch' approach reinforces the sense that higher education is 'different' from other

sectors in that motivation is likely to be intrinsic, and that individuals expect to grow beyond the precise terms of what is in their job description or contract.

Possible ways forward

The examples given above have implications for ways in which employment packages are devised so as to accommodate and value a wider range of academic and professional identities. This may require, for instance, more flexible career and pay frameworks, 'soft' reward and incentive mechanisms, and the adaptation of workload models and promotion criteria, so as to encourage a positive motivational climate. Facilitating solutions within formal regulatory requirements is also likely to involve local managers, who are close to and understand immediate pressures for individuals, in partnership with and in support of senior management teams and governing bodies. Recent evidence suggests that poor alignment can occur between the perceptions of senior management teams and those of academic staff in relation to the outcomes of a change, for instance strategies for recognising and rewarding performance in teaching (Higher Education Academy (HEA)/University of Leicester 2009). The process of implementation, therefore, is likely to require careful analysis via, for instance, option papers, and a 'Change Academy' approach (Higher Education Academy 2010) by a broadly based institutional team that explores issues and potential solutions. This is especially so when institutional budgets are strained or when strategic re-orientation is sought.

In order to both inform and deliver strategy, fora for discussion may need to be broadened, to include not only academic and professional staff, but also lay governors and external partners. Lay governors can also be called upon for their experience and insight of practices in related professional spheres, for instance by asking questions about the added value of new forms of activity, so as to encourage reflection amongst the senior management team. Governance therefore has a leadership role in encouraging a climate of self-evaluation, although this may

be rolled out in partnership with managers at local level who have a monitoring role, identifying issues and possible ways of resolving them. Improved information may be needed about the implications of changing practices and ways of working, including not simply data but, for instance, qualitative indicators such as the likely value added by new forms of activity, and the potential loss for the institution of not taking cognisance of these; thus a more nuanced assessment of risk factors. More attention may also be required to the selection and training of members of decision-making bodies, as well as clarity about the devolution of authority and decision making to local levels.

External triggers can also provide an opportunity for change. Thus, as Strike (2010) notes, Recommendation 50 of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in the UK (Dearing 1997) urged the formulation of a framework for determining pay and conditions of service:

> "Dearing, in particular, was concerned that the … current conditions … were hindering the development of the sector" (Strike 2010, p. 79).

Subsequently multi-table bargaining was replaced by a joint approach, and all jobs in higher education were evaluated by institutions and placed within a national grading framework. In order to progress that task locally, institutions tended to use a 'job families' approach. Institutions therefore, in different ways, accepted the opportunity to create a framework better suited to needs. Strike (2010) examined various potential models, including a more clearly articulated "Climbing Frame" adopted by the University of Southampton, which enabled a variety of academic pathways including those of research, teaching, administration, or a balanced profile. As Whitchurch (2009) has argued, it would be possible to create a matching framework that incorporates work in "Third Space", described above. Other institutions in the UK are revisiting the potentiality that might be afforded by a 'climbing frame' model as they seek to motivate staff who perform primarily teaching, administrative or

entrepreneurial/community-facing roles. However, Strike's initial findings suggest that even when procedures and structures has been modified, it is important to appreciate the perceptions of key stakeholders such as staff, and to communicate the reasons for and implications of such changes.

Concluding remarks

Issues arising from the studies described in this paper suggest that governance frameworks, and the management practices that support them, may lag behind the demands of a diversifying workforce. Furthermore, although governance and management roles and processes have been the subject of considerable discussion in the literature, they may be liable to be accepted by default at institutional level. Institutions may wish, therefore, to consider how the two processes interface with and inform each other, and how this relationship works for them in the context of a diversifying workforce. A wider discussion may therefore also be needed about the concept of 'management' in higher education, particularly in relation to multi-professional teams and line relationships between people who are involved in project work, which often require a significant degree of creativity and innovation. The narratives illustrate an expectation that dialogue between institutions and staff, reflected in the way that individual staff are 'managed' day-to-day, will be discursive in nature, and that decision-making will be subject to critique and debate.

In this context institutions may wish to review:

- The development of governance and management practices that are facilitative rather than prescriptive in relation to possible modifications that might be needed to standard employment frameworks.
- The creation of job descriptions that facilitate mobility and role enhancement.

- The use of rewards and incentives (not necessarily financial), such as responsibility allowances, eligibility for special awards, and professional development opportunities, particularly for those working in non-mainstream employment categories.

- Inclusion in workload models and promotion criteria of activities such as, for instance, partnership building and development activity.

- The use of attachments and associateships to recognise crossover activity, for instance to an institutional research centre.

- How to find ways of supporting staff who see themselves as outwith mainstream roles and career paths via, for instance, mentoring or coaching.

Institutions are likely to have their own action lists, but such an approach may help to achieve the flexibility required to accommodate activity on the ground that may be running ahead of institutional strategy, and to ensure that it also contributes to the delivery of formal objectives. Judging the degree of freedom available within institutional governance frameworks, how these might be interpreted and progressed so as to achieve an appropriate balance of facilitation and control of activities, is likely to remain a key challenge for those leading contemporary institutions.

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