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SECOND DRAFT

Beyond Administration and Management? The Changing Identities and Voices of Professional Administrators and Managers in UK Higher Education

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Introduction

Despite an ongoing process of professionalisation, the roles and identities of administrators and managers in UK higher education are neither clearly conceptualised nor understood. Over time, a relatively homogeneous group of staff in the pre-1992 sector, that modelled its collective identity on a tradition of public service, has expanded and diversified. Roles have become increasingly fluid, and career pathways are no longer linear or pre-determined. The identities and voices of this group of staff, therefore, remain susceptible to uncertain and even contradictory constructions.

Conventional descriptors of professional identity, such as affiliations to knowledge, institutional or system structures, fail to capture the dynamics of day-to-day working and professional relationships in contemporary institutions. Nor do broad-brush terms such as 'management' and 'administration' offer sufficient clarity. Moreover, the polarisation of work between academic activity and a separate, supporting infrastructure, is becoming outmoded. New understandings are required, therefore, for

a range of professional identities and voices that increasingly cross academic and organisational boundaries. This chapter considers these changes, drawing in part on interviews with thirty-five senior and middle level administrators and managers in the UK.

Contexts

As a starting point, the definition of "managers and administrators" given in a publication by the UK Higher Education Staff Development Agency (HESDA 2001) is used. This distinguishes them from contiguous groups such as clerical and technical staff; teaching and learning, library and IS professionals; and academic managers such as pro-vice-chancellors. Professional administrators and managers may be either specialists, such as those in finance and human resources, or generalists, such as those in student services or departmental management. However, as will be seen, there is increasing fluidity between functions and identities as the composition of professional staffs in universities diversifies. Nevertheless, when references are made to 'professional' staff in this chapter, this refers to administrators and managers, so as to differentiate between them and academic managers, such as deans or pro-vice-chancellors. It is not, however, intended to imply that other categories of staff in universities are not also professionals in their own right.

In UK higher education, professional administration and management had their origins in a tradition of public administration, exemplified in government service. This was strongest in the pre-1992 universities, in which 'the Administration' was seen as a discrete entity, separate from the academic community that it 'served'. The identities of professional staff were based on that of the disinterested civil servant, who vocalised the legal and regulatory aspects of policy and its implementation,

providing continuity and upholding standards. The academic administrator's role as "guardian of the regulations" (Barnett 2000: 133) has its origins in this tradition. Thus, academic administrators were regarded as a repository of information, providing the collective memory of an institution, which was passed on from one generation to the next. They were a source of continuity, compensating for the limited terms of office of rotating academic managers such as deans and pro-vice-chancellors (McNay 2005).

In the academic administration model, relationships tended to be structured and hierarchical, so that staff replicated the work patterns and approaches they learnt from those senior to them, rather than creating new spaces. To quote one head of administration:

> "… there was a sort of perception that you served your time and you knew your time would come and all the rest of it."

National salary scales for administrators and managers, related to those of academic staff, reinforced the idea of a professional cadre of staff who might build a career across institutions. Attached to the Administration would be expert functions such as finance, estates, and human resources, but there would be little permeability between them. Strains of the civil service model still exist; particularly in what is sometimes referred to as academic administration (Barnett 1993), that is, registry and secretariat functions.

The post-1992 (former polytechnic) sector had a stronger ethos of 'management', whereby institutions were staffed by permanent directorates, rather than rotating academic managers as in the pre-1992 sector. According to one head of institution,

this created “a bit of a gap” between administrative staff undertaking clerical, process-oriented roles, and managers operating at the directorate level. It was not easy, in this context, to combine the role of administrator and manager, or to move from one to the other. By contrast, in the pre-1992 sector, administrative staff at all levels were likely to be involved in giving regulatory and policy advice to academic colleagues. Because of these different cultures, there was little interchange of professional staff between pre- and post-1992 institutions before the sectors merged, but as cross-sector movements began to take place after 1992, the system became more heterogeneous. What began as a relatively cohesive cadre of professional administrators in the pre-1992 sector (Bosworth 1986), therefore, has become a coalescence of overlapping professional groups across the system (Allen and Newcomb 1999), which is subject to constant reconfiguration.

Sourcing the identities of professional administrators and managers

In order to describe distinctions between administration and management in a theoretical frame, the identities and voices they offer can be modelled in terms of “soft” and “hard” characteristics, as shown in Figure 1. Building on Becher and Trowler (2001: 36), and Trow (1993), “soft” attributes represent people-oriented, conciliatory approaches, aimed at achieving either a personal service, such as welfare advice to students (soft administration), or a consensual policy framework for decision-making (soft management). The softer approaches of each modulate the more purposeful quasi-legal upholding of regulatory processes, standards and values (hard administration), and the pursuit of an institution's unique selling proposition in the market (hard management).

"Soft" administration

Soft administration traditionally encompasses staff in supportive roles; typically protecting others from potential hazards. In a student services environment this would include one-to-one advice, designed to ensure that individual students who come into a one-stop shop obtain the academic and pastoral attention that they require. Similarly, in a school office a business manager might provide a personal briefing to the head of school on the budgetary and management information required for a management meeting, so that the head is not ambushed in a debate about the filling of a post. This kind of work is resource-intensive, geared towards meeting the particular requirements of a particular client at a specific time and location. Information has to be conveyed in such a way that can be understood by, and be of benefit to, the receiver. It therefore demands an ability to comprehend and empathise with the needs of another, and its voice can be characterised by the term "generosity".

"Hard" administration

The idea of "hard" administration is drawn from ideas of public service accountability, even-handedness and justice, and is expressed in rules and boundaries that regulate activity and ensure fair play. It also involves an increasing burden of legal and statutory requirements (such as health and safety, financial and academic audit, data protection and freedom of information). It emphasises the application of procedure, rather than bespoke or individual solutions. It is a system-oriented and ensuring function designed to maintain security of provision, and avoid disaster, such as breaches of legal requirements or financial accountabilities. It remains a critical thread in the lives of professional administrators and managers, not least because of

the reputational damage that can be caused by adverse publicity attracted by breakdowns in good practice. As external accountabilities have grown, this function has become more high profile, meeting, for instance, the requirements of the quality assessment agencies for teaching and research, and an increasingly litigious environment, in relation to both staff and students. It therefore speaks a language characterised by the application of "justice".

"Soft" management

"Soft" management brings understandings of issues such as institutional potential and reputation into the frame when hard decisions are being made, for instance, around market positioning and the diversification of income streams. Thus, the financial risks and advantages of expansion into a new campus serving part-time, non-traditional students are weighed against the qualitative impact on the shape of academic programmes, modes of delivery and the university's overall teaching and research profile. A "soft" management view would consider the future of small-scale subject areas in the context of synergies between disciplines, rather than purely in terms of cost benefit analysis, and look for options around the possible re-alignment of programmes.

Internally, "soft" management is characterised by negotiation in the distribution of resources, using external market pressures as one, but not the sole element in decision-making. In tight circumstances it would focus on capacity building, playing to institutional strengths and adjusting activities to achieve optimal solutions of benefit to a majority of people. Finally, "soft" management promotes institutional research and development, so that traditional roles in anticipating and solving

problems develop into broader scenario-building capabilities, as the institution's mission is contextualised and reappraised against its environment. It therefore speaks a language characterised by "negotiation".

"Hard" management

"Hard" management represents the business aspects of operating in a market environment, with the aim of generating commercial income. It is driven primarily by considerations of financial profit and loss, and also by ambitions to build new markets. If it becomes dominant in an institution it is likely, also, to create an ethos of internal competition, usually through reward and incentive systems, such as the return of overheads to principal research investigators, or the pricing of services between internal 'customers'. Thus, internal competition between individuals or departments is used to point up performance levels, for instance, in terms of research income or overseas student fees, and a win-lose culture informs strategic direction, putting pressure on staff not simply to operate at maximum effectiveness, but also to demonstrate their value via competitive benchmarking. Its language is, therefore, characterised by "opportunism", geared towards seeking and recognising gaps in provision, and how new needs might be recognised and met.

Legacies of administration

The civil service tradition, informed by an ethos of public service, underpinned those aspects of administration associated with ensuring consistency, fairness and appropriate standards, and for providing disinterested judgement in the application of policy and procedure. The voice of 'service' that the administrator provided was, therefore, not unique or distinctive to the individual, and could be substituted by the

voice of another person trained in the same administrative cadre. Arising out of this, there is a sense in which the public administration ethos offered a kind of non-identity, described by Self as:

> "… the anonymous and cloistered role of the high official, which derives from an environment that is deliberately protected from personal political involvement, as well as being somewhat removed from direct operational tasks" (Self, 1972: 180).

Moodie and Eustace (1974) applied this to a university setting:

> "They [administrators] formulate issues and arguments, the count, they inform and they render all necessary services to their master, but they have to act in accordance with decisions which they have no formal power to determine." (Moodie and Eustace 1974: 157)

This comment also has the implicit suggestion of subservience, thus a suppressed identity and voice. In the words of one respondent:

> "…administrators were expected to be seen and not heard, not to speak at a committee, except perhaps the Registrar, and then only when asked to give an opinion, you know, 'Registrar, can you remind us of the Regulations' or something, that kind of thing…" (Head of administration).

In this situation, the only way an administrator could offer information or articulate an opinion would be to act as 'ventriloquist', enabling academic colleagues to speak with authority on matters for which the administrator provided the hidden text, for instance, admissions figures, financial information, or intelligence about activities of competitor institutions. Individuals, therefore, adopted a generic identity that

depended for its existence on a common system. In Hall's terms, they were characterised more by "sameness" than "difference" (Hall 2000: 16). This kind of inheritance contributes to the "invisibility" described by (Szekeres 2003; 2004), the "liminality" described by Gornall (1999) and Conway (2000), and the lack of recognition or status offered to administrative staff, described by McInnis (1998).

The anonymity of official personae created rituals described by one head of institution as being like those of a "medieval court", with associated forms of address according to one's place in the social system. The various constituencies of the university colluded in this, notwithstanding any private understandings about the value of professional staff. This led to a kind of muted communication or dialogue, whereby the 'silence' around what was not articulated publicly was filled by tacit, private understandings as to who was the source of information, even if that person did not act as spokesperson. As one head of administration put it:

> "I think that senior academics… recognise full well the value that they get from support services…*whether they would admit that* always is another matter…" [author's italics]

Thus, academic and professional managers deferred to the formal enactment of roles, at the same time as obliquely acknowledging the other's power and authority:

> "… there are quite a number of occasions where you are introduced by somebody and they say that you're the person who really runs the University…" (Head of administration).

Rhetoric around ideas of 'service' also masked any agency on the part of professional administrators and managers:

> "what I hope we do is provide a service. It may be a service the university *doesn't know* it needs, but it does and we provide it as best we can…" (Head of administration).

This comment demonstrates the kind of underplayed confidence of the traditional civil servant, whereby all parties are aware of underlying dependencies in the relationship, but enact these within a formal ritual of advice given and received. In this scenario, the voices in the dialogue become oblique, and their expression indirect. This 'muteness' can be used to create an element of inscrutability, as described by another head of administration:

> "… there is that thing about actually finding out from people what it is they think without giving a lot away."

Thus, while in some circumstances silence may be interpreted as implying invisibility or insignificance, in others it may also infer control, and be used as a tool in situations requiring negotiating or political skills, depending on the degree of agency adopted by an individual.

Administration meets management

The 1980s saw the beginnings of a journey towards management that represented a significant culture shift, particularly for professional staff with a background in academic administration (Whitchurch 2004; 2005). Major changes had occurred in the working environment, whereby reductions in government funding meant that institutions were obliged to become more market oriented, so that:

> "… any time after about 1980, you really couldn't be a strong academic institution if you weren't either stinking rich or … sufficiently well-managed to … stay the right side of the line." (Head of administration).

Many UK universities responded by establishing devolved budgetary and planning arrangements, superimposing distributed management arrangements and executive decision making on hierarchical committee and administrative structures. This process has been documented by (Clark 1995; 1998; 2004), who refers to a "central steering core", or senior management team, with professional managers out-posted to faculties and schools to stimulate activity in the "academic heartlands".

Under these arrangements, posts in schools and faculties, that had come within the purview of the academic administration, and had had titles such as 'assistant registrar', were converted into 'business manager' posts, with responsibility for budgeting and resource allocation. At this point, people who had originated as academic administrators came face-to-face with 'management'. Staff in such posts often had dual lines of accountability, for instance, with a direct line management relationship with a professional colleague in the university centre, and a dotted line relationship with an academic manager, such as a dean. For others the reverse might apply. They were, therefore, likely to be influenced by the needs of the academic locale in which they were located, as well as being expected to express a corporate, institutional view.

The multi-vocality that could arise from such dual lines of responsibility is illustrated by a business manager in an academic department, who had strong loyalty to colleagues there. At one point, however, there had been a lack of congruence between her approach and that of the head of department in producing a business plan for presentation to the central management team. The manager described the necessity

of appearing to face two ways, in order to distance herself from a plan with which she felt uncomfortable:

> "I had to see [a member of the university's senior management team] afterwards and say that this … didn't have my input in the way I would have wanted it, because I don't see how it's sustainable; so I felt really awful saying, you know, 'this is me… I don't want to have to defend it because I can't.'"

This brings into focus the tensions for someone who had line management responsibilities to a head of department, but did not want their competence to be questioned by the central management team, and felt that their professional credibility might be at stake in both locales. The use of the words "this is me" illustrates that, while the individual had allegiances to the department, she had another voice that was asserted when she wished to distance herself from a document that might have reflected badly on her. She was, therefore, trying to locate herself in two places at once. This meant using different voices to express different aspects of her identity (as a team player in her department, and as a corporate player at the centre).

Notwithstanding these kinds of tensions, staff who made the journey from 'administration' towards 'management' found themselves having a closer involvement in executive decision making, in the choices to be made around resource allocation, and in the implementation of change strategies. They also assumed more developmental roles, such as assessing opportunities by which the university might extend its range of activity, for instance, through franchise operations. This meant taking a view about future possibilities, as well as the means of achieving them. Yet, at the same time, there is evidence of discomfort on the part of both academics and

professionals about openly acknowledging this movement towards 'management'. Although it might be understood implicitly that references to 'administration' involve a spectrum of activity, including 'management', this is not necessarily articulated publicly. Thus, one manager reflected that:

> "it's… safer to call it administration, but we all know we mean management."

Again, this suggests a dual identity, one for public consumption as an 'administrator', and another for private consumption as a 'manager', and also a dissonance arising from the way that these concepts are articulated and understood across the university community. Similarly, at national level, there has been a reluctance to move away from the term 'Administration' in the titles of the two professional bodies representing professional managers and administrators, that is the Association of Heads of University Administration, and the Association of University Administrators, possibly because of lingering sensitivities deriving from a public administration ethos, about where final responsibility lies for 'managing' the university. This is in contrast, for instance, to the situation in Australia where the national association is titled the Association of Tertiary Education *Managers*.

While career professionals undoubtedly regard themselves as managers (Whitchurch 2005), it would seem that their hesitancy about using the term 'management' derives not only from the perceived legitimacy or otherwise of the term 'management' in universities, but also from the perceived legitimacy of administrators and managers having a distinctive voice and identity that is separate from, as well as derived from, academic identities. These uncertainties are reflected in the reflection that:

> "…good university management means recognising and distinguishing what is best left relatively 'unmanaged' from what must be firmly managed." (Holmes 1998: 110).

One possible interpretation of this comment is that functional areas such as finance and estates must be firmly managed, whereas other areas such as academic policy development may evolve in a more leisurely fashion. However, as academic activity becomes entwined with contributory functions such as study skills, outreach, or the construction of sophisticated research facilities, it is increasingly difficult to place clear boundaries around 'management' and 'academic' activity.

As these distinctions blur, professional staff find themselves occupying space which gives them greater discretion in the way that they contribute to complex institutional agendas, particularly in relation to extended projects that have accrued around, for instance, student support and welfare, and business partnership (Whitchurch 2006). In these kinds of areas they are constructing and managing their own working territories and managing collaboratively with colleagues, as well as continuing to undertake operational and line management in conventional office settings. There would appear, therefore, to be a challenge for a new generation of professionals to find identities and voices that are both distinctive to them as individuals, and can be regarded as legitimate in the university.

Service meets partnership

Concurrent with these developments, there are indications that those continuing to operate in service-oriented roles within the academic administration model, which in the past offered stable understandings about responsibilities and boundaries, are

finding themselves increasingly exposed. On the one hand, this model could make for synergy if joint working between head of department and administrator was symbiotic:

> "like Sir Humphrey [in the UK television series *Yes Minister*] … taking a burden of work off the head of department's shoulders". (Departmental administrator).

On the other hand, this model could also create hazards, for instance, if the head of department decided to distance herself from a policy that the administrator was responsible for implementing, after the policy had been agreed. The administrator could then become positioned as an outsider, and find herself in a vulnerable space:

> "you do feel, not 'naked'…, but you are 'open to the elements' kind of thing".

Not only is there potential for harmony to become disharmony, but any harmony that is achieved is likely to be provisional. Within this model, therefore, individuals could be caught between an identity that is dependent on that of academic colleagues, and one that places them outside the structural frame in which they thought they were located.

As administration moved towards management, the idea of service began to mutate into an ethos of 'partnership', in which professional staff assumed greater agency and responsibility. One head of administration described this more discretionary kind of relationship between professional staff and their academic colleagues as a:

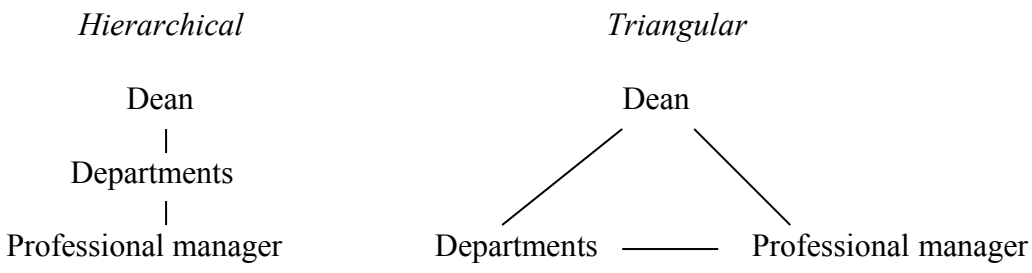
> "…notion of partnership, that we're working in this together; … you know, 'I am perfectly happy for you to get all the kudos for that, but I'm not necessarily going to hide completely behind' ".

In partnership working, professional staff not only become more visible, but also more accountable, for instance, for the success or otherwise of projects which they are responsible for designing and delivering. This means that they not only take or share responsibility, but are also exposed directly to the effects of success or failure, for instance, the impact that this may have on their career and professional life chances.

A recruitment manager exemplified the re-positioning of someone who, as an admissions officer, would traditionally have been in a position of 'service' to a faculty dean. She referred to this inheritance as "this façade, that we pretend exists". However, while the faculty dean technically retained line management responsibility for the admissions process, the professional manager had, in practice, been given delegated authority to take executive action in circumstances for which she had built up case law through practice and precedent:

> "unless there's a really serious problem, the dean wouldn't be directly involved… but it does give a useful framework at times so, for instance, if a department and I have a major disagreement over a student, then the dean can act as the arbiter." (Recruitment manager).

The relationship had moved, therefore, from a hierarchical to a triangular one:



This shift of relationship represents, for the professional manager, a move from simply being the provider of technical advice about, for instance, A-level scores and meeting target numbers, to having a recognised place in a coalition of management, in a flatter, more collaborative structure. As a member of this coalition, she was contributing to judgements about meeting student intake targets, the impact of broader entry qualifications, and the effect that any decision would have on the teaching process. In Barnett's terms, therefore, she was part of the "conversation" between the academic community and the institution (Barnett 1993). Thus, communication had become two-way, and the professional manager an active player in dialogue and debate, having a legitimate and independent voice, rather than being solely a conduit for information. These shifts of positioning are reflected in the evolution of a discourse of 'partnership', rather than one of 'service'.

Overlapping territories

Partnership working involves both a sharing of common territories, where academic and management decisions coalesce, and also the creation of new, often composite territories, where professional managers might bring together the contributions of others, and also make an independent contribution. One senior manager described her relationship with academic colleagues in terms of equivalence, but difference:

> "I hope they would see me … as working in partnership … especially once we've worked together for a little while and they begin to appreciate the sort of things that my involvement can bring … and certainly I don't feel that I'm providing a service." (Senior manager).

Feeling that she was working in partnership enabled this person to define her own space, at the same time as "educating" colleagues about what she was able to offer,

for instance, the ability to take a holistic view of how a planning document might be written. Thus, she was continuously "negotiating new meanings" (Wenger 1998: 226) with her colleagues.

Likewise, a finance officer describes how she moved in and out of her specialist function:

> "…operating on the outside of finance, to[wards] the university, and operating inside finance, having a very effective team… " (Finance officer).

She described this mutuality as "a bond and a relationship" that she had developed with colleagues in the senior management team, effectively creating something at the interface that went beyond service, consisting of the building of a shared field of practice. Although, in this case, common territory was facilitated by the existence of a head of institution who was "financially cute" (literally crossing into the finance officer's territory), the finance officer was also proactive in crossing boundaries to understand and acknowledge academic mindsets, whilst placing academic agendas in a practical context:

> "You need to have a community of scholars; … But I can… understand the arguments for… leading edge research, blue skies thinking, creating new ideas… which actually service the economy in the longer run…" (Finance officer).

The impact of the post-1992 institutions in furthering this kind of crossover between management and academic territories is illustrated by a head of administration who had worked in both sectors. After her move to a post-1992 institution, she had been

criticised by her head of institution for not involving herself in academic decision making:

> "when I first came here I was … sort of honed in the kind of old university culture; I refrained from offering any comment on academic matters; … because, you know, you wouldn't have expected to be consulted in the old system… [The vice-Chancellor], when he had my first appraisal with me, … was actually quite critical of me for not doing this." (Head of administration).

Thus, although some commentators have suggested that there has been a polarisation of agendas between academic staff and professional managers (for instance, Halsey 1992), there is also evidence that these groups cross into each other's territories (Middlehurst 2004; Whitchurch 2004), with professional administrators and managers undertaking functions that in the past might have been undertaken solely by academic staff. These can include, for instance, giving recruitment talks in schools; attending recruitment fairs overseas; negotiating research grants and contracts; writing bids to external bodies for the funding of academic programmes; and compiling documents for the Quality Assurance Agency or Research Assessment Exercise.

Conversely, there is also movement in the other direction between the traditional roles of academic and professional managers, whereby academic managers were responsible for policy and strategy, and professional managers were responsible for the delivery of these. Thus, in some institutions academic managers, such as pro-vice-chancellors, are being given portfolios for administrative areas such as resources, creating 'fuzzy space' between the pro-vice-chancellor, the head of administration, and/or the head of the functional area. In some cases, pro-vice-chancellors are also being given line management responsibility for staff in their functional area. This further blurs relationships, for instance, between a pro-vice-chancellor (resources), a director of finance, and staff in the finance office. This reconfiguration of professional space means that identities and voices associated with particular roles are being disturbed, and are being re-made by individuals, according to their particular circumstances and positionings, creating a dynamic that cannot be understood simply by referring to organisation charts or job descriptions.

Re-articulating professional space

While the model in Figure 1 is one way of describing the range of characteristics associated with higher education administration and management as they have evolved over time, the increasing fluidity of professional space in the contemporary university makes this framework begin to seem restrictive. Neither the terms 'administration' and 'management', nor other generic descriptors now used, such as "professional services" (Lambert 2003: 94), take full account of the permeability that has developed between institutions and their external environment (Bauman 2000), or of the multi-functional projects that have emerged across the university (Whitchurch 2006).

The difficulty of finding an appropriate terminology was reflected by a head of administration, who spoke of the existence of "something other" than administration or management, although they could not "quite put into words what that 'something other' is." In order to articulate that "something other", new ways of considering professional identities and voices are needed. For instance, beyond the frames of administration and management, new roles have emerged, in which professional administrators and managers increasingly work with "Mode 2" knowledge, which is:

> "…transdisciplinary rather than mono- or multi-disciplinary… carried out in non-hierarchical, heterogeneously organised forms which are essentially transient… [and] not institutionalised primarily within university structures." (Gibbons et al. 1994: vii).

Thus, the planning officer who develops a connecting narrative for the university plan provides a new 'layer' of text, interpreting one aspect in the light of another, for instance, a new build or refurbishment in the context of academic directions and ambitions. In this way she is creating contextual knowledge, which contributes to both acceptance and delivery of the plan.

The following examples of individuals who extended their identities beyond roles that originated within academic administration illustrate the kind of diversification that has taken place:

The niche builder

The ability to develop applied forms of "Mode 2" knowledge is represented by a group of professional managers who have dedicated themselves to building

composite, niche knowledges within their institution, in areas such as quality, widening participation, or external relations. They are exemplified by a manager with responsibility for pan-institutional information and data management, which in the past would have been a function restricted to student records in a registry environment. She believed that she had been appointed to the post because she had familiarity with all aspects of what she termed the local "business environment", and was also able to contextualise her technical knowledge with the needs of, for instance, finance, human resources and payroll.

Thus, she was able to ensure that the component parts of the total activity worked together ("the interlocking interfaces and then the combination system"), by translating between representatives of different functions, within and outside the institution, and "articulat[ing] a technical problem to people who aren't technical", thus performing an act of translation. Through her contacts, in both the commercial and university sectors, she was able to build intelligence about the future that could be invested in her local niche. Despite being well placed, through contacts with suppliers, to move into the commercial sector, she had a strong affiliation to her institution and to the higher education system:

> "It would take an amazing offer to get me out of here… I mean I do have loyalty to the university… there's lots of people around, it's dynamic… you see students, they're in the library doing things, you actually see what we are all working for… I enjoy that." (Information and data manager).

Thus, the ability to apply generic knowledge to local circumstances, creating bespoke, contextualised knowledge, and to act as interpreter and translator within and between

constituencies, become key elements in the developing roles and identities of professional managers.

The professional manager

The concept of the *professional manager*, as distinguished from the 'professional administrator', emerges as the pre- and post-1992 sectors meld over time. A student services manager whose role would, in the past, have been contained within academic administration, indicated that she was deliberately building her identity in this way. She had distanced herself from the 'administrative' label, because she saw this as representing "the soft welfare underbelly" of the institution, and felt that she would gain more credibility in career terms by establishing new business processes and being recognised as a change agent.

She had, therefore, consciously tried to build a transferable identity that would enable her to move within the sector. Such a move could allow her to cross into academic territory, for instance to a pro-vice-chancellorship. Progress towards a new identity involved developing generic skills and attributes as a manager, rather than focusing down further on her knowledge base in student services. She acknowledged, with some regret, that in order to do this she had relinquished the "luxury" of policy-making. Because her work was necessitated arguing for resources, she had been obliged to adopt a voice that was more political, reflecting the fact that, in her current locale, managers were expected to enter the debate and to "take a position" so that "people know where you stand" on specific issues, such as whether or not additional students should be admitted to generate income, despite the pressure that this would put on facilities. The various re-positionings that this person had gone through in

identity terms meant that she was "not really sure what kind of professional [she was] any more", hence the re-orientation as a *professional manager*.

The pathfinder

In a world of increasing uncertainty and un-knowability (Barnett 2000), anticipating and determining the future direction of institutions has become increasingly risk-laden. Past success is unlikely to be an indicator for the future:

> "unwillingness to go by precedents and suspicion against accumulated experience … are now seen as the precepts of effectiveness and productivity. You are as good as your successes; but you are only as good as your *last* successful project." (Bauman, 2005: 44).

The blurring of boundaries within and outside the university, and the increased significance of professional networks, means that the accumulation of experience takes place simultaneously as well as sequentially; indeed, learning from the past could be regarded as a hindrance. Another group of professionals act as pathfinders in mapping institutional cultures and assets against this swirling environment. In doing this, they are open-minded in their continuous interrogation of the projects with which they are involved, re-contextualising local activity, and drawing upon contiguous knowledge territories:

> "Things work best when you have a working knowledge of other areas… it's important to know about funding arrangements for students, because if you're

> going out to recruit, that's often the question you're going to be asked". (Recruitment manager).

Pathfinders also create new knowledge fields, particularly, as one partnership manger suggested, where universities find themselves in "virgin territory", without the knowledge or experience to navigate it. This person had constructed a package encompassing research, enterprise and regional partnership activity. The uncharted nature of much of this terrain had enabled her to stake out new territory for her institution. Thus, the role involved "a whole new brief in terms of how research fits with the wider third leg academic enterprise kind of agenda." Delivering the overarching project involved lateral links, for instance with academic directors of research and external partners such as the local Regional Development Agency, and she was at the centre of a communication web. She had adopted an exchange approach, characteristic of Senge's "learning organisation" (Senge 1990), in developing understandings between the three areas:

> "I educate them [external partners] about research, as they educate me about… our engagements with business, the community and other social entities, the regeneration agenda… and all of that stuff."

In terms of career development, she saw merit in working in an area that was continually reshaping itself:

> "I'm quite happy to be in this department [the business development office], because it's the one area of the university which is growing… that is serving a timely need and agenda. I'm happy to have lost all of that *administrative*

> *function of supporting research students*… it's just not good for your career development." [author's emphasis]

By relinquishing processing functions associated with registry work in favour of roles involving innovation and development, she was able to pick up intelligence that would enable her to adjust her identity to meet changing conditions:

> "I see myself moving into the business development kind of area a lot more; which gives me the opportunity to re-package myself for new jobs outside the sector."

Thus, *pathfinders*, as well as contributing to their institution's developing identity, were also reconstructing their own identities.

New Becomings

As they establish and chart new professional space, the identities and voices of professional administrators and managers display a palette of shades beyond the monochrome profiles associated with the 'generalist administrator' or the 'professional specialist'. The partnership manager described the diagnostic and reflective role played by this new kind of professional, who is increasingly integrated within the community of the university, and who contributes to its collective "wisdom" or knowledge base:

> "… ideally you want a leavening of the old hands, and new staff coming in with fresh ideas and so forth; but you need that kind of leavening of institutional wisdom that, you know, carries on and helps oil the wheels in its own way." (Partnership manager).

The idea of "leavening" (defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "pervasive transforming influence" or "fermentation") implies an incubatory function, helping

activity to germinate, and also involving an investment for the long term, from which there might not be an immediate outcome:

> "We're not ploughing the ground, we're not sowing the seeds, we're not watering the ground, we're kind of gathering up stones first… Something like that." (Partnership manager).

Such professionals place as much emphasis on the cultures of their institutions as on their structures, looking beneath the surface of institutional life for root causes, acting as interpreters between different constituencies, and forming a bridge between them:

> "[For academic staff] It's often just about, you know, bureaucracy and administrative interference and this, that and the other, when I'm not sure they're actually saying that, they're saying something else. They're kind of saying that 'I'm busy and I'm stressed and I just can't cope with it any more'… That's something I've argued when I dare, to various people within the university. There's something about… a cultural malaise, and some rigorous cultural self-analysis needs to go on with a view to, you know, trying to change things, so that academics feel more empowered to do more different things." (Partnership manager)

Here the manager is giving voice to key problematic for universities, whereby academic and management agendas are seen as competing narratives inducing a "cultural malaise". When she talks of change, it is in terms of creating a more facilitative and sympathetic culture, rather than the imposition of regulatory constraints, showing sensitivity to suppressed voices in the university, of individuals who are unable to articulate the stresses that are affecting them. She takes it upon

herself not only to interpret what they are saying, but also to transmit this message to those who may not want to hear it, bringing into view something that could otherwise remain hidden. At the same time, this manager is acting as a catalyst, seeking to minimise cultural inhibitors that may be blocking the development of academic activity.

By acquiring a deep understanding of the university as community, as well as of its changing environment, administrators and managers contribute to the "re-contextualising" (van Oers 1998) of the university against what can be competing imperatives, such as public and private income streams, globalisation and regional partnership, mass higher education and research selectivity, and a requirement to contribute to the nation's economic and social welfare, as well as enhancing its stock of knowledge and cultural capital. These imperatives demand the ability to undertake predictive roles, and to weigh up future possibilities against existing institutional potentials. In carrying out this function, administrators and managers cannot rely on structural or policy frameworks they have inherited from the past and are, therefore, re-conceptualising them.

Thus, in Henkel's terms, the professional identity of administrators and managers might be said to have shifted from something that comprises essential elements (an "essence") to something built by individuals over time (a "project") (Henkel: 2000: 13-14). Rather than acting solely in accordance with pre-determined frames, such as job descriptions or institutional precedent, this group of staff display a capability also to be protagonists, with increasingly active and interpretive voices. They are, thus, participating in the construction of their own professional selves, demonstrating

agency as well as "acknowledging the impact of social and structural constraints" (Woodward, 2002: 30). These identity movements represent a process of continual 'becoming' for professional administrators and managers, in which:

> "What we are at present matters less than what we are becoming" (Kemerling 2001).

Conclusion

Beneath the broad mantle of 'administration' and 'management' lie a range of multi-layered identities and voices. These have extended over time, both in terms of the breadth of knowledge carried by professional administrators and managers, and the depth of their involvement in connecting core academic functions to the mixed economies against which contemporary institutions operate. More specifically, these identities and voices display a facility to apply and interpret knowledge in increasingly sophisticated ways, translating between internal and external constituencies, and contributing to organisation research and development. Not only has the collective identity of professional administrators and managers diversified, but individuals, also, show themselves capable of adopting a range of voices and identities over time, and across the various projects with which they become involved, re-inventing themselves professionally as the need arises.

Thus, the binary division between academic and other professionals in the university (or "diarchy" (McMaster 2005)) is being replaced by a mosaic community, in which administrators and managers, along with other professionals, are interleaved. Moreover, this is not a static picture: an ongoing professional fluidity, generated as universities grapple with conditions of increasing risk and uncertainty, mean that it is

perhaps more of a kaleidoscope than a mosaic. In constructing and renewing their identities, professional administrators and managers become part of the dynamic that "allows the institution to go on changing itself and adapting effectively to a changing society" (Clark 2004: 174).

However, this chapter suggests that identities are more complex than is implied in Clark's description of administrators and managers as "bureaucrats" (Clark 2004: 86), which belies their increasingly multi-dimensional profile as members of the university community:

> "Increasingly, they [professional managers] participate in institutions' basic academic work, and like faculty, they have important expertise about the academy to contribute in shared governance." (Rhoades 2005: 5).

Similarly, in another chapter of this book, Taylor promotes the idea of a "commons" that reflects universities as sites of "super-complexity" (Barnett 2000). He suggests that, rather than academic identities being constructed solely in opposition to "the forces of corporatism and managerialism", they should become more "context-sensitive", incorporating traits such as "networking, laterality, hybridity, flexibility, multi-tasking and media capab[ility]". In counterpoint, this chapter suggests that this process, including that of exploring "alternative identity options", is already under way for professional administrators and managers.

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References

Figure 1: "Soft" and "hard" characteristics of administration and management