

Using Causal Layered Analysis to Explore the Relationship Between Academics and Administrators in Universities

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Abstract

Universities are complex organisations requiring a range of skills, knowledge and expertise to operate effectively. Since the last quarter of the 20th century, when a separate administrative work jurisdiction began to emerge, academics and administrators have had to co-exist in universities. With growing pressures from government for accountability and transparency during that time, that co-existence has been increasingly characterised by a tension most often described as a 'divide'. This paper reports on the findings of a research project undertaken in 2008 using Causal Layered Analysis to explore the nature of this tension, and perceptions that a 'divide' exists between academic and administrative staff in universities.

Keywords: higher education management, universities, academics, administrators, professional managers

"We often live in two different worlds. The academics feel that the administrator's main drive in life is to push as much annoying paperwork as possible on to the academics...They do not feel that anything the administrators do is worthwhile for the student or them. The administrators feel that the academics are so removed from 'real life' that there's no point in trying to explain 'logic' to them."

Comment from Australian participant, 2008

Introduction

Universities are complex organisations requiring a range of skills, knowledge and expertise to operate effectively. Since the last quarter of the 20th century, when a separate administrative work jurisdiction began to emerge, academics and administrators have had to co-exist in universities. With increasing pressures from government for accountability and transparency during that time, that co-existence has been frequently characterised by a tension most often described as a ‘divide’.

Some recent research (McMaster, 2003; Szkeres, 2006, 2008; Whitchurch, 2006, 2008) dealt with the academic-administrator ‘divide’ and the generally negative characteristics associated with the relationship between these two core groups of university staff. Partnership is often cited as a way to bridge the ‘divide’, but there is little articulation of the nature of that partnership. An assumption underpins many of these presentations and papers and the concept of partnerships - that the ‘divide’ does in fact exist, and that it is part of the fabric of university life.

There is little research, however, that investigates:

- the nature of the ‘divide’ and why people think it exists or not, and what characterises it;
- what underpins people’s beliefs about the ‘divide’ (for example, clashing values different perspectives on the purpose of universities or the lack of professional status for administrators),
- whether the ‘divide’ is myth (i.e. based on people’s perspectives and built and maintained through stereotypes) or real (that is, a structural or systemic characteristic of universities), and
- whether current solutions to bridging the ‘divide’ such as establishing partnerships are realistic and feasible without first understanding what generates and maintains the ‘divide’ in the first place.

A research project undertaken in 2008 used Causal Layered Analysis to explore what lies beneath surface indications that the ‘divide’ exists, to identify whether it is myth or reality, and to determine the impact of the ‘divide’ on effective university management. It focused on how individuals experience the ‘divide’ in their day-to-day work.

Issues around how academic/teaching staff and professional/administrative staff relate to each other is one that has relevance across all tertiary education institutions and any organisational setting where professional staff are managed. What appears to be different in universities is that there is a ‘felt’ tension between beliefs about who should manage that may not be a factor in how professional-manager relationships are experienced in other types of organisations. That is, the nature of academic institutions is such that expectations around who manages them are deeply rooted in academic culture and tradition.

This paper explores perceptions and beliefs underpinning university management and discusses implications for how universities are managed, both today and into the future. It also discusses the value of CLA as a research methodology to explore issues such as the academic-administrator ‘divide’.

Definitions and Terminology

The term ‘**administrator**’ refers to those staff who work in university faculties/schools and corporate departments who are employed to undertake tasks associated

with managing learning, teaching, research and corporate functions. The term is used in the British/Australian sense in that it does not apply to the Vice-Chancellor or President and their direct reports. In Australian universities, the term ‘professional staff’ is being used more often; however the term administrator is used here because it is traditionally used to describe the ‘divide’.

Management is used in a broad sense, capturing the myriad of work that coordinates activity across universities to enable learning, teaching and research to occur, and which allows universities to meet obligations to its external stakeholders.

‘Divide’ is shorthand for the academic-administrator relationship. It is placed in inverted commas to indicate it is a term often used but which is not well understood by either academics or administrators.

The Context: Why Does Understanding the ‘Divide’ Matter?

The external environment in which universities operate has changed radically over the past 40 years (Veblen, 1957; Rourke & Eustace, 1966; Besse & Perkins, 1973; Karol, 1980; Lockwood, 1985; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998), from a time where there was little survival pressure on institutions to an external environment that is more demanding of universities and what they do. Shifts in technology, consumer behaviour, demographics, social attitudes and government funding constraints have been driving universities towards a business model for operations and reporting for many years.

In an increasingly complex and uncertain external environment, the effective management of higher education institutions has never been more important, and the reason for this remains unchanged since it was first explored (see for example, Shattock, 2000; Smith, 1990; Smyth, 1995; Warner & Palfreyman, 1996; Kenny, 2009; Sharrock, 2012). As Stace (1984, p. 71) wrote:

Effective management and leadership is of critical importance if our institutions are to make a significant contribution to their societies. This is not to place management and leadership of IHEs [institutions of higher education] on a plane higher than scholarship per se, but it does indicate that these two ingredients are of fundamental importance...Management and leadership is of critical importance if the institutions which occupy such a focal position [in society] are to effectively discharge their responsibilities.

It may seem obvious that academic and administrative staff need to work together to manage universities in ways that ensured they retained a strategic ‘fit’ with their operating environment. If universities had been immune to external forces of change, the evolution of the relationship between academics and administrators would probably not have been an issue for discussion and reflection. The incursion of what is usually derisively termed ‘managerialism’ into universities in the 1980s, however, and the subsequent responses to shifting academic and administrative roles (McInnis, 1998; Lauwerys, 2002; Szekeres, 2004; Witchurch, 2006; Winter, 2009; Derounian, J., 2012) saw the ‘divide’ build in intensity.

Managerialism is the term used to describe changes in management approaches from collegial to more business-like practices. The reasons for this shift have been well documented, as have responses by academic staff to the consequent challenges

to academic values and ways of working (see for example, Lindsay, 1995; Slaughter, 1997; Smyth, 1989; Watson, 2000). As part of this shift to more business like operations, administrative staff roles changed from one of primarily support to one of coordination and management of organisational tasks and functions needed to respond to government demands for increased accountability across all operations. Institutions were merged and restructured, new layers of management introduced, and academic staff moved further from the decision making structures while increased administration and compliance functions were added to their roles. Administrative staff came to be seen as the conveyors of managerialism, and the 'divide' grew in the minds of staff.

Both academic and administrative roles changed radically as a result of the impact of the same external forces, but this research indicates there has been virtually no meaningful discussion about how the two roles 'fit' together in the university that has emerged over the past 40 years (Moodie, 1994), nor about who is best qualified to do the work that is now required to manage universities today. Instead, we see academic staff who believe their role is being devalued and who are trying to retain core academic values at the heart of their work (note here that it assumed that those values are still relevant in the 21st century), counter-posed with administrators who increasingly see their work as inherently valuable because their work enables the university to meet external demands for increased efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency.

As academics became more divorced from decision-making, it appears administrators became more removed from the academic core of institutions, and the teaching, learning and research activities they were managing. A gap emerged between the values and beliefs of the two groups about how universities are managed. As McInnis (1998, p. 171) wrote:

what we have now is a new level of underlying tension between two groups of 'professionals' within the universities, with the old (academics) perhaps losing ground in authority and status, and the new (administrators) making strong claims for recognition as legitimate partners in the strategic management of the university.

The 'divide', once perhaps a myth, had become part of the reality of the experience of university work, and began to be reflected in behaviours and interactions between academics and administrators. Understanding the impact of this gap in beliefs has not, however, been high on the agendas of university leaders – this research provides some data to demonstrate the nature of this gap and suggestions for closing it.

Methodology

There is a significant body of work that relates to how academic work has changed over the past 40 years, and how academics are responding to the increasingly corporate way of managing and running universities. More recently, there has been work focusing on the views of administrative staff about this changing university workplace, their role within it, and how they connect to and integrate with academic work (see for example, Conway, 1998, 2002, 2002a; McMaster, 2003; Szekeres, 2004; and Whitchurch, 2006, 2008). For this research, a methodology

was needed that would allow both the experience of work and perspectives about underlying drivers of change in university management to be identified and explored by those who do the managing, in order to determine the impact of this change on academics and administrators beliefs about university management.

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is a methodology that seeks to delve beneath the apparent and surface signs of an issue to explore underpinning systems, structures and worldviews. Developed by Inayatullah (2004), the method allows ‘drilling down’ beneath superficial reporting of feelings and reactions to explore often unconscious and unarticulated views and perspectives influencing and driving that issue. It allows the range of meanings associated with the issue to be identified, and locates the issue within the broader social structures within which it is felt and experienced. The method accepts all perspectives as valid, and by surfacing different and often divergent perspectives, it is possible to see how an issue has been defined more by perceptions and myth rather than reality. More importantly, moving among the levels creates a deeper understanding of the issue being explored, and highlights what Inayatuallah (2009: p 7) calls a transformative dimension – “to deconstruct so that alternative futures can be investigated and desired futures created.”

The process used in this research was informed by Inayatullah (2004) and De Simone (2004). Each CLA level was explored with participants through the following questions.

Litany

- How would you describe the relationship between academics and administrators in your institution and in universities more generally?

Social causes

- What systemic factors (trends or drivers of change) do you believe are driving the relationship described by the Litany?

Worldview

- What assumptions are driving the social causes?
- Whose perspective is dominant? Whose voice is not being heard?

Myth/metaphor

- What impact would the continuation of the relationship in its current form have on the management of universities?
- Create a quick snapshot of your discussion, using imagery/myth/metaphor.

The following series of questions then guided subsequent discussion:

- in your opinion, is the ‘divide’ real or myth?
- if real, what action do we need to take to address the ‘divide’ – if any?
- if myth, how do we dispel it, or do we ignore it?
- consider:
 - what assumptions need to change?
 - which group can help the most?
 - How, and in what ways, can we reconceive the ‘divide’?

During the period March to July 2008, a series of workshops, focus groups and

interviews were held in the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand and Australia. Approximately 150 people were involved in this stage of data collection. Once preliminary analysis had been completed, it was decided to run a follow-up online survey to test some of the emerging themes. There were 23 respondents to the survey.

The same questions were used in face-to-face data collection and the online survey. The survey, however, had an additional question asking respondents to describe any particular story about their experience of the relationship. Many stories of personal experience emerged during face-to-face sessions and the follow up survey was therefore designed to also capture this sort of data. Detailed notes were taken during workshops and focus groups rather than tape them, and so verbatim comments from participants are not available from these sessions. Quotes used in this paper come from responses to the online survey.

Participants

Participants self-selected to be involved in the research following an expression of interest process. Since this was exploratory research, the aim was to gather data to make an assessment of whether the ‘divide’ was a phenomenon worthy of further investigation. No restrictions were therefore placed on who could participate, although it was intended to focus on administrative staff to provide them with a voice about their experience with the ‘divide’. However, academic staff also attended the UK workshop and focus groups in Australia and New Zealand. Approximately 90%, or 135 participants were administrative staff. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of participants.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Participants*

Gender	80% female 20% male
Location	47% in faculties 27% centrally (corporate) 13% academic support units 13% other
Classification	49% Senior Managers 44% Middle Managers
Contact with Academic Staff	83% have direct contact (daily) 15% have indirect contact
Length of time in Higher Education	42% up to 10 years 36% between 10 and 20 years 22% 21 years +

Results

This section reports on comments made by participants and identifies emerging themes. Where possible, responses have been grouped into three categories – (i) administrative perspectives, (ii) academic perspectives, and (iii) general

perspectives.

The litany

Table 2 provides indicative responses to the question: *How would you describe the relationship between academics and administrators in your institutions and in universities more generally?*

The Litany is typically unchallenged and represents feelings about an issue – “I feel like this...” At this level, these responses are not questioned, they just ‘are’ and represent valid expressions of how the ‘divide’ is being experienced.

Table 2. Responses to Litany Question

Administrative Perspectives	When it all goes wrong, I have to bail them out.
	We never question their expertise but they question ours.
	If you don't do teaching or research, then you are just a parasite.
	Academic ideal is alive and well even though we know it is dead.
	They dump work on me that should do.
	I think Sir Eric Ashby describes it best. His speech in 1966 coined the term ‘necessary evil’ to describe administrators, quoting advice given to him by a Professor: ‘in the eyes of all Professors, all administrators are an evil. Say to yourself every morning ‘I am an evil, but I am a necessary one’.
Academic Perspectives	Administration is too important to be left to the administrators.
	Administrators are high cost and low value, whereas academics are high value and the cost doesn't matter.
	The enemy within.
General Perspectives	Can be brutal.
	Relationship is icy. Administrators do not respect or appreciate the stresses faced by academics nor the effect of policies on students. Academics do not understand the thinking or methods employed by administrators.
	I would describe it as an unnecessary truce. In general I think that academic staff see administrators as either servants or controllers, depending on the level of power the administrators has in the institution. In general, I think that administrative staff see academics as being marginally competent in the realm of administration and the ‘sensible’ things of life, but at the same time they can be leading thinkers in their discipline.

While most comments at this level were negative in tone, two participants in focus groups viewed their relationship with academics as positive and did not see any evidence of a ‘divide’. This suggests that the experience of the ‘divide’ may not be systemic, and acceptance of its existence depends on individual perspectives about their role. This was confirmed by the apparently conflicting words used by participants to describe the relationship:

- undervalued, difficult, distrusting, exhausting, interesting, fragility, icy, not appreciated, daunting, disrespectful, bewildering, dismissive, strained, ineffective, tense, and
- respected, positive, professional, supportive, invigorating, friendly, hierarchical, civil.

At the Litany level then, administrators were saying ‘value us and give us recognition’. In their view, their expertise and knowledge necessary to manage universities was being ignored or devalued and was affecting how they interacted with academics in a mostly negative way. This view was also highlighted by McInnis (1998: 162) in his survey of senior administrative managers in Australian universities, and 10 years later, the results of this research suggest the intensity of this feeling has not abated.

Social causes

Table 3 provides indicative responses to the question: What systemic factors (trends or drivers of change) do you believe are driving the relationship described by the Litany?

At this level, it was not possible to separate comments into administrative and academic perspectives.

Table 3. *Responses to social causes question*

Combined Academic and Administrator Perspectives	Increasing compliance and reporting demands
	Increasing separation of administration from core business
	(External) pressures and touch points have changed and exacerbated divide
	Now a real tension between being a resource and a regulator
	Increasing demands for customer service
	Institutional cultures (and leadership) not supporting a positive culture.
	Lack of understanding of nature of freedom for academics – tension between freedom and responsibility (move to managerialism)
	Political/economic drivers driving academic behaviour (eg research performance)
	Lack of understanding of the nature of academic freedom, increased by managerialism.

That both groups identified the same social causes or drivers of highlights the fact that changes to both academic and administrative work have been shaped by the same external forces, but impact on their work domains was being experienced differently. For example, one participant reported this divergent development of roles as generating a tension between her wanting to be a resource for academic staff yet being forced into the unwelcomed role of regulator of their work. Participants in this research could see that a separation of administrative work from the core

business of the university (teaching and research) had developed.

At this CLA level, participants had a clear understanding of factors that had contributed to the development of a ‘divide’ as they experienced it. At this level too, there were five comments about institutional leadership, generally around how senior managers who ‘walked the talk’ and ‘messages from the top’ influenced the relationship between academics and administrators at any university. The shift to using the terminology ‘professional’ staff at some Australian universities was mentioned by one administrator as a positive step to better define the value of the administrative role, but terminology exists at the Litany level, and will have little impact unless supported by corresponding worldviews.

Another participant saw the ‘divide’ as being related to institutional type – at her previous traditional university, she perceived the ‘divide’ to be greater than at her current place of employment (a 1970s university). The work and issues were similar yet the divide was more visible at the former, which she attributed to the perceptions and assumptions about academic and administrative roles held by senior leaders - that is, different worldviews. This suggests that culture and organisational norms also influence the degree to which the ‘divide’ is seen to exist.

Digging one level deeper allowed the causes generating the feelings expressed at the Litany level to be identified. The comment about the disconnect between teaching and learning and administrative work as a result of increasing regulation and accountability demands suggests that participants also understand the secondary impact on both work and relationships generated by these social causes.

Worldview

Table 4 shows responses to the questions: *What assumptions are driving the social causes? Whose perspective is dominant/privileged?*

Table 4. *Responses to worldview questions*

Administrator Perspectives	Academic work has a higher value; the perspective of academics is paramount
	We assume academics are collegiate.
	General staff are servants.
	Academics have never been in the real world.
	General staff have nothing worthwhile to say.
	Have no say in decision making about their roles.
	Assuming that the role of administrators, even in senior roles, is to take notes at meetings

Academic Perspectives	Academic autonomy.
	Academics are dispensable
	Pendulum has swung so far that academic work is being devalued Tertiary admin disassociated from workplace experience of research & teaching.
	Admin has all the power and plays to a different set of rules to those to which academics abide.
	Size of administration continues to increase.
	Academics often assume that because support staff are there to support teaching and learning, they are therefore there to support academics, rather than both working to deliver teaching and learning in different ways.
General Perspectives	Growth is good. Contrasting ideologies.

It was clear that academics and administrators feel that the other group's worldview dominates attitudes about how universities should be managed. One participant commented that academics often feel that they are being treated as increasingly dispensable, and that they also feel ignored in the management discourse now operating in university management (see for example, Winter, 2009). Another participant related how academic and administrative staff meet separately in their department, and administrators are not permitted to be involved in decisions affecting their work that are made at these academic meetings. This type of situation, where the professional expertise of administrators is ignored during decision making has the potential to generate ill-will, but could also result in decisions that cannot be implemented effectively on the ground because of a lack of understanding of the implementation context.

An indicative comment at this level from the academic perspective is: *Divide is demoralising for academic staff. Funding of teaching has reached a point where >60% of government funding in our university is used to support administration. Depts receive less than 40% of funding which must pay for staff salaries (academic and general) and cost of teaching. Academic staff feel that they are doing the 'work', teaching and research, that brings the status and reputation of the university but are never praised or acknowledged by administrators.*

The following comment from one participant also suggests that administrators might have to do some work on clarifying the value of their work themselves: *Administrative staff are inclined to consider themselves less important than academic staff and that their role is secondary to the role of academics – academic staff think the same.*

This was the only response that suggested that administrative staff may be viewing their role as less important than that of academic staff, with most responses suggesting that parity of esteem for the two roles was needed. Nevertheless, it is a valid assumption and may well contribute to the way the 'divide' is experienced – that is, that administrators might have a subconscious 'chip on their collective

shoulders' about their roles.

Another comment suggested that while in most organisations, there are a range of types of people, the 'normal distribution' of people working in universities is skewed because of the nature of academic work and the diversity and number of often eccentric people on staff – this highlighted the effectiveness of administrators doing a good job of managing this environment to get things done. It may be that this ability to navigate an academic environment to achieve outcomes is an intangible and unique skill held by university administrators that is not needed in other organisations. It is, however, a skill that requires a deep understanding of academic values and work and of academic worldviews. If there is now a perceived gap between management and academic work, then not having this intangible skill could explain frustrations felt by administrators in their interactions with academic staff, and vice versa.

Another participant commented that these assumptions were neither right nor wrong, but reflected the contrasting purposes of the two groups of staff. This statement is underpinned by an assumption however – that academics and administrators do not share a common purpose or goals. This assumption needs to be challenged, since many participants commented on how they had the same goals relating to teaching and learning and the student experience, but had been 'forced' to pursue them in different ways.

This CLA level highlighted that there does appear to be a fundamental difference in academic and administrator worldviews about managing universities and who should influence and control how their institutions are managed. Even though most people acknowledge the external environment in which universities operate has changed significantly, with subsequent changes to how universities need to be managed, no common ground between academics and administrators as they interact to manage their workplaces has emerged.

What began to emerge at this level is that administrators may view their expanded role as innately valuable, rather than seeing their roles as critical positions that manage work **within** an academic environment - that is, their roles are only valuable in the context of managing a university. While administrators used generic management skills, how those skills are deployed within universities is what gives value to the university manager role. This, of course, infers that there is something unique about university management that requires a particular application of those skills and that is an assumption to be tested.

Participants had the most difficulty framing responses at this level. This is not surprising, since worldviews are deeply held and often unconscious mental models of ways of seeing and making sense of the world. For any change to happen, worldviews first need to change and this involves people recognising that their perspective on the issue may be limited or flawed. At this level, assumptions that drive the patterned responses that emerge as the Litany need to be articulated and challenged. Some participants recognised this, while others reverted to a Litany reaction during discussion, but there was not sufficient time to draw out and explore these assumptions in a more robust way.

Myth/metaphor

This section provides answers to the question: *What impact would the continuation of the relationship in its current form have on the management of*

universities?

For this research, participants were asked to articulate responses through the use of images or metaphors to explore underpinning narratives generating their worldview.

The following is a list of the metaphors produced by participants. As with the Social Causes level, it was not possible to differentiate between academic and administrators responses.

- A cloud of administrators descending on academics who are drowning in a sea of bureaucracy.
- Car mechanics (administrators) driving cars (teaching and research) around in circles.
- Needing marriage guidance counselling – the relationship is not firing on all cylinders.
- Admin Mafia
- Enemy at the Gate
- The Good, the Bad and The Ugly
- Jurassic Park
- War of the Worlds
- ...parallel paths, never quite merging
- ... a caste system inhabited by scholars and secretaries
- A sheltered workshop
- Interested professor and few helpful clerks
- An (admin) missionary trying to get the point across
- A decaying empire – a great monolithic thing on the landscape. Structures and processes to allow it to grow, but becoming stagnant on the inside and increasingly irrelevant. Choked by vines growing up and over it.
- An arranged marriage - you don't know what to expect and thereafter, are always struggling to know the others values, goals and strengths.
- Delivery of a more impoverished 'product'. One imagines two camps plotting against each other and attempting to subvert the efforts of each because of the absence of a shared commitment to quality teaching and learning provision.

The metaphors were overwhelming negative which, given previous discussion, was to be expected. Those people who earlier indicated that they had positive relationships with academic staff were, significantly, also unable to develop a positive image or metaphor.

In all images, there is a sense of two things: one that administrators are imposing unreasonable workloads on academics (for example, *a cloud of administrators descending on academics drowning in a sea of bureaucracy*), and two, that the negativity of the relationship is having a negative effect on universities as a whole (for example, *a decaying empire*).

Frustration at the current situation underpinned many of the images created. The need to challenge the assumption identified at the Worldview level that academics and administrators have contrasting goals appeared here when participants created images to describe a status quo future with perceived goal divergence:

- would get in the way of goals,
- everyone can sign up for goals – it is the subsets of behaviours that are destructive, and

- it would be a disaster.

Shared goals would seem to be an appropriate determinant of who does what work in the future rather than today's situation where work roles are determined by classification as academics or administrators. One participant commented:

What does the term academic really mean? More than just a teacher, a researcher, it includes deans and professors who are managers and who don't teach – aren't they administrators? But they are not paid as general staff.

The emergence of this academic manager class in universities is beyond the scope of this research; understanding this role in the context of academic and administrator roles is a topic for future research.

In 2011, this research was used in a UK conference presentation to identify a positive metaphor for the relationship (Fearn, 2011). The metaphor identified was a zip – two sides coming seamlessly together – but this metaphor still has two sides. All metaphors identified are based on the idea of two sides, and none move beyond this to a single group doing university work. This suggests that assumptions and worldviews in university management are entrenched and need to be challenged if the gap between beliefs about university management is to be bridged.

Reframing the myth

This final part of the methodology was designed to seek participant views about how the 'divide' could be reframed so that both academic and administrative work was given parity of esteem in university management. Questions used to trigger discussion were:

- in your opinion, is the 'divide' real or myth?
- if real, what action do we need to take to address the 'divide' – if any?
- if myth, how do we dispel it, or do we ignore it?
- consider:
 - what assumptions need to change?
 - which group can help the most?
 - how do we reframe the 'divide'?

The results of this discussion are reported here in reverse CLA order, starting with the myth/metaphor level and building up to the Litany level (Table 5). The responses highlight action that can be taken to reframe the 'divide'.

Table 5. *Reframing the Myth*

Myth/Metaphor	While participants did not identify a 'new' myth or metaphor to define the relationship, the image of a phoenix rising from the ashes was identified by the researcher during analysis. This image infers that the old order has been destroyed and a new set of conventions about university work can be developed.
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Worldview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify shared values • Change the terminology used to describe administrators – ‘just call everyone staff of the university’ • Take it back to students and core business...change behaviours and attitudes via that. • Reinvent the ‘divide’ as a positive, a creative tension • Identify and promote shared values • It requires a cultural shift, the valuing of the contribution of ALL staff involved in the process of university education. Academics need to “relinquish” their attachment solely to their academic / discipline knowledge. Admin staff need to “value” the role they play.
Social drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open up the discussion about work roles in institutions: • Challenge the assumptions about the value added by administrative staff • Understand that professional staff are there to support teaching and learning, not academics • Clarify who really holds the power (understand the difference between governance and management)
Litany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the terminology used to describe administrators (education ministries, take note!) • Standardise conditions [for both academic and administrative staff].

The participants in this research have, while not realising it, provided the characteristics of their preferred university management model in the future:

- an inclusive set of terminology to describe university staff,
- a single university workforce with the same conditions, promotional opportunities and rewards,
- strategy that talks about one set of goals to which all staff can align their work,
- one set of values focused on common learning and teaching goals,
- co-creation of work rather than arbitrary divisions of labour based on arcane work classification systems,
- inter-dependence rather than separation in work.

Actions proposed focus on the concept of a single university workforce, not burdened by outmoded classification systems and work practices or dysfunctional views of the ‘divide’. The concept of the third space (Whitchurch, 2008), where academics and administrators move across traditional roles work together on specific projects, and the androgynous professional (Moodie, 1994) where appointment to positions is based on expertise not classification, begin to capture this desired or preferred future – a workspace where respect is based on competence, skills, knowledge, behaviours and outcomes rather than qualifications and stereotype. A work space where, for example, students or teaching and learning is used as the basic design and decision principle for work roles and processes, and where cultural ‘rules of the game’ are re-written.

Discussion

Is the ‘divide’ real?

As one participant pointed out, it is dangerous to generalise about academics or administrators as single groups since both are heterogeneous, and the notion of a ‘divide’ between professional groups is not confined to the university. From the perspective of administrators today, however, the academic-administrator ‘divide’ is a real phenomenon, and it is also multifaceted. It is experienced differently, depending on where one works in an institution, the particular roles occupied at a given time and possibly, the type of employing institution. Its impact is mediated by individual relationships and the degree of goodwill, and individual perceptions are a significant driver of whether or not administrators believe there is a ‘divide’ between themselves and academic staff. That is, how administrators perceive their professional identity (Whitchurch, 2006) and how they perceive their role will affect the degree to which they experience the ‘divide’. Some identities referred to by participants in this research included:

- an enforcer or regulator,
- a partner in the student experience,
- ignored, invisible, and
- a bucket to kick when the going gets tough.

Possible hypotheses emerge from this identity stance. If administrators believe their roles are to enforce rules/regulations, then it may be more likely they will have a negative relationship with academic staff. In the UK, in particular, this tension between supporting and enforcing, between being a resource and a regulator seemed to be felt keenly. Most administrators want to support the core academic business, but feel their roles are being shaped by external imperatives which means they are seen as enforcers or regulators, rather than contributors to that academic business.

If, on the other hand, administrators view their roles to be partners in the student experience, they may be more likely to believe that there is no ‘divide’, and/or that they have a positive relationships with academics. The degree to which this role of ‘partner’ is recognised by academic staff, and whether administrators are seen as having something of value to offer the student experience, however, has not been tested beyond individual case studies (McMaster, 2003).

Work location also appears to be significant. It may be that it is easier to be viewed as a partner in academic work after one has spent some time in a faculty context, working closely with academics at the ‘frontline’. Responses from administrators suggest that in this context, particularly where they are seen as problem solvers, the individual relationship is characterised by goodwill, even if the administrator leaves the faculty for another position in the university. In contrast, an administrator working in a corporate department does not have the opportunity to establish goodwill in the same way, and participants reported that these staff are often viewed as bureaucratic or managerial in approach, whether or not their worldview is aligned with that of academics.

What also emerged was an often strongly stated desire to rebuild or reframe the ‘divide’ by thinking and talking about what needs to be done to run universities in the future rather than dwell on how it is managed today, identifying how to do that,

who does it and what knowledge and skills they need.

Are partnerships the answer?

One of the drivers for this research was to explore whether or not the concept of 'partnership' as a viable option to address the 'divide' proposed in conference and journal papers over the past decade (see for example, Gill, 2008; McMaster, 2003; Szekeres, 2004; Whitchurch, 2007) was in fact realistic. Partnerships infer that each partner brings something of value to the relationship, and it is apparent from this research that many administrators believe academics see no value in the administrative role, and increasingly, the feeling is mutual. If this is the case, then any partnership will always be unequal until underpinning assumptions are challenged and changed.

Nevertheless, this research showed that at the local level in faculties/schools, the relationship between academic and administrative staff is generally positive and this is supported by the literature, limited though it is. A survey of faculty managers in Australia (Haywood, 2007) suggested that 70% were satisfied with their role. McMaster (2003) explored how deans and faculty managers work together, and identified different types of relationships that develop between the two roles in faculties, including nested, contiguous and segmented partnerships (McMaster, 2003, p.7). A higher degree of interdependence exists at this local level, while as one participant suggested, outside faculties, there is less understanding of her role, and more stereotyping. As a result, beyond this local level, there is less trust and understanding, with the result that a new 'divide' may be strengthening between faculties/schools and central departments.

The evolution of the relationship between academics and administrators could continue to be incremental, which is what is suggested by the idea that partnerships are the way to bridge the 'divide'. This approach, however, is akin to tweaking the existing model to make the symptoms feel better, rather than addressing the worldview clash which appears to be at the heart of the 'divide'. Partnerships are also a Litany response, when what is needed to move beyond the 'divide' is a Worldview response to close the gap.

The value of CLA as a methodology to explore and better understand the 'divide'

CLA provided a valuable framework for moving beyond the Litany of the academic-administrator 'divide' to surface and explore aspects of the 'divide' participants were experiencing. The myth/metaphor level, in particular, generated some striking images to describe the relationship, and it was notable that all these images were negative in tone.

The Litany level was the easiest for participants to respond to, and it was comments at this level that were subsequently reported by The Times Higher Education Supplement (Gill, 2008, 2009). The best understood level was the Social Causes level, since this involved the identification of issues, challenges and trends that were very much part of the everyday working life of participants.

The CLA level most difficult for participants to engage with was the Worldview level. First recognising that there were different but valid perspectives on the relationship, and then attempting to define the assumptions underpinning those

perspectives was challenging. While surfacing assumptions is never easy, the limited time available for participants to explore this level probably contributed to their challenge, and highlights the need to spend time in this space of the CLA model to allow deeper understandings to emerge and be discussed - particularly given that a worldview clash is likely to be a primary reason for the strengthening of the 'divide' in recent years.

The CLA process allowed both academics and administrators to have their say about how they worked with each other on a daily basis, and then to begin to place their perspectives in a wider context about work in universities in general. It allowed them to locate the 'divide' in a way that moved beyond individual experiences, so that a somewhat deeper and more inclusive perspective could be taken on the relationship, rather than perpetuating a negative view from the academic or administrator 'bunker'. Perhaps most importantly, the process allowed them to move to a more positive space where commonalities rather than differences were the focus of discussion in the reframing stage.

The findings of this research are limited, however, in terms of the time available to explore the worldview level in particular, since this is the level where any change to address the 'divide' will have its origins. Most participants believed change was necessary, but there was not enough time during the research to consider the exact nature of that change, and how a new, shared worldview might develop over time.

Emerging questions for future research

A number of questions have emerged which could usefully be explored in future research:

- Does institutional type (that is, traditional or new universities) matter? Is the professional administrative role more acknowledged and accepted in one type? If so, why?
- What are the characteristics of positive professional relationships, particularly those at the faculty/school level?
- What are the shared values that we want to underpin university management in the future?
- How does the emergence of the academic manager class 'fit' with the concept of the 'divide'?
- Is the emerging 'third space' (Whitchurch, 2008) a model for the future of university management?
- Is there increasing tension between faculties and central management areas, and is it likely to have a greater impact on effective university management in the future than the relationship between academics and administrators?

How individuals experience their relationships with colleagues is personal. This research focused on administrators, and it would also be valuable to explore in more detail how academic staff feel about their working relationships with administrative staff, in ways that moved beyond the Litany level. In the same way, how Vice-Chancellors feel about how their staff interact with each other and its effect on university management would be instructive.

Conclusion

The history of universities is characterised by evolution in shape and operation, and that evolution will need to continue if the university will be able to develop effective responses to the uncertainties and complexities of the external environment. This research has demonstrated that the quality and effectiveness of university management in the future that will be required to facilitate these responses is likely to depend on our collective understanding of:

- values, beliefs and assumptions about the core business of universities and the management of that work to achieve desired outcomes,
- the external drivers and imperatives that continue to influence and shape the nature of work in universities, and
- the totality of work that needs to be undertaken within a university now and into the future to enable its goals, both as an institution and as a contributor to society, to be achieved.

Developing these sorts of understandings requires more than words about partnerships or retreating to negative stereotypes as worldviews clash. It requires not only administrators and academics being open to learn about each other's ways of working today so that administrators are no longer viewed as 'a necessary evil'. It also requires a much clearer view of the nature of change driving the pressures all university workers now feel and which manifests itself in often dysfunctional relationships. Put simply, it requires a new way of thinking about university work, both collectively and as individuals – and new worldviews.

University management is a contested space. Administrators believe it is theirs as indicated in this comment:

...academics are not taught management or administration skills but are elevated to management roles based on being a good academic. They are the leaders of the University's as VCs. This is where the continuation of the divide occurs – the more that universities embrace good management over good academics in the leadership roles then the divide may lessen.

On the other hand, academics still have a vested interest in ensuring the space reflects academic values underpinning their work, which is not surprising since it is academic work that is being 'managed'. Resolving the professional contest over this space will require not only a visible settlement about the division of labour (Abbott 1988). It will also require new individual and collective worldviews to be constructed and realised in practice to ensure that managing academic work is undertaken in ways that do not perpetuate the 'divide' into the future.

The use of CLA in this research demonstrated that we need to re-write the 'unwritten' rule book that currently determines how universities are managed to enable a reframing of the 'divide', and to reframe perceptions about the value that administrators bring to that management process. There is an opportunity to shape this reframing if we can let go of the old paradigm that informs thinking about both how universities 'should' be managed and by whom, and the myths that now underpin how academics and administrators relate to and work with each other. For new management models beyond the 'divide' to happen, it is at this worldview level that our ways of making sense of how universities need to be managed today and into the future need to shift, and quickly.

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