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From Education to Training: The Quiet Exodus

Hank Schaafsma
University of Technology, Sydney

Abstract:

This paper explores the impact of the expansion of training and consultancy services to industry on the tertiary teaching of adults. The study was conducted within the Faculty of Adult Education, University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) this year. The rate of change and its impact on staff in this Faculty is perhaps best exemplified in the growth of an entrepreneurial unit, 'Training and Development Services'. This change is examined here from the perspective of the academic staff and the perceived impact on teaching and learning.

The research question that emerged during the past two years of amalgamation change was posed as follows: 'What changes have you perceived in the past two years to be significantly affecting the way you work here?' As an action researcher, the author wished to examine to what extent traditional values about teaching and learning were shifting from an 'educational' to a 'training' orientation. The assumption was made that this was a complex process that depended upon external as well as internal factors. However, the key to this successful change appeared to lie in the internal networks of those staff who chose to become involved with training and development-type activities.

The perceived shift in emphasis to a 'market orientation' in training, (as well as consultancy and research) at the tertiary level has become the reflexive focus for this action research study. The author, as a participant-observer, perceives himself part of the quiet exodus from 'educational' to 'training' activities that may also be taking place in other educational institutions. What this means in terms of the changing practices of adult educators is a concern shared by many staff in this Faculty. What they have to say represent the interim findings for this case study.

Introduction

Since 1988, the number of short, training courses and consultancies, offered by staff in this Faculty of Adult Education, on a fee-for-service basis, has increased significantly (Annual Report of the Faculty, 1989, p.9). Although this paper will focus on this trend, it should be emphasized that staff perceived a range of other changes occurring concurrently.

The Contexts of Educational Change

Against a national background of College and University amalgamations, tighter university budgets, declining relativities of academic salaries and within the context of a newly-amalgamated university, the changes described in this case study at UTS are possibly not atypical. Furthermore, the impetus to externally-sanctioned change in this direction has been provided at the national level by the Training Guarantee Act (31 May, 1990), and in New South Wales, by the establishment of the Educational Training Foundation and a host of competing providers of training services.

The structural changes that have occurred within this Faculty, deal with tangible achievements such as re-structuring, enrolments in new courses, research initiatives and educational or training innovations. In an increasingly competitive university environment, the publication of these achievements in annual reports and elsewhere are designed to establish our public credibility within a technological university culture. At the interpersonal and individual level of academic staff, the values and attitudes

used for appraising such changes as 'successful' are not shared uniformly in this Faculty. The social contexts for change also need to be understood in terms of the shared values of staff.

Three examples of changes in this Faculty are first outlined below as examples of 'public presentations' of change. Perceptions of these changes form the basis of this study.

(a) Fee-for-Service Training & Consultancy The creation of a new unit, called "Training and Development Services", (TDS) did not initially represent a significant change when it was set up at the beginning of 1988, after some successful pilot programs in 1987. However, in the past two years TDS has grown so spectacularly that it now employs three full-time academic staff and four clerical staff with a turnover that is expected to reach more than a million dollars in 1990. Specifically, this administrative unit has become responsible for developing and delivering a wide range of short (2-3 day) courses in HRD as well as training consultancies, on a fee-for service basis to clients in government and industry. To date more than forty full-time academic staff (62% in 1989) have participated in the work of TDS.

(b) Post-Graduate Course development in Adult Education The number of new courses that have been brought on stream by means of a 'fast-track' mechanism, has also increased in the past two years. Next year will see the introduction of one new PhD program and a Masters program that will be offered across all Schools. Within the School of Adult and Language Education, there will be a new Bachelor of Adult Education (HRD), a new Masters and a one-year Certificate program in TESOL, plus two fully-funded full-time programs. A content analysis of new courses on offer in both the B.Ed and M.Ed provides evidence for a shift to more HRD-oriented subjects and topics.

(c) Funded Research in Adult Education (including Language & Literacy & TESOL) During the past two years, externally funded research has jumped from approximately \$75000 to \$650000 per annum. However, the majority of staff who were successful in gaining the largest grants were in fact new to the Faculty. The great majority of staff in this Faculty (70% approximately) are currently not involved in conducting pure or applied academic research that has been funded. However, more and more staff are involved in industry-based consultancy and other forms of 'research and development type' work. There is evidence that the focus for this research will increasingly shift to industry-based needs which will be defined cooperatively between industry and staff in this Faculty.

For this writer, who accepted the invitation to participate in all of the above activities, this work also came to symbolise a more fundamental paradigm shift in academic work practices. Using Nadler's (1986) framework, this shift from education to training has been evident in what people value and what people do in various programs. Whereas education in this place has traditionally focused on individual adult learners and the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for their future job (e.g. as TAFE teaches); training, by contrast focuses on learning the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to initially perform a job or task or to improve on current performance. Professional development activities are not directly job related but are oriented to both personal and organizational growth.

The Research Questions

The decision to conduct research into the question on the perceptions of these changes, was partially motivated by my own involvement in teaching a new post-graduate subject called "Action Research in the Workplace". I wanted to examine reflexively the process of conducting a small-scale research study into my own (changing) work-place and thereby become a more 'reflective practitioner' (Boud, 1985; Smyth, 1986). The outcome would be a critical look at my own priorities, values and teaching practices. In practice, these were explored reflexively through the conversations and discourse with colleagues.

All educational change is ideologically-based (Popkewitz, 1984). In this case study, the ideological differences were embedded in the perceptions of staff about three changes: in their priorities for doing research, in their commitment to developing new courses and in their decision to participate in activities associated with Training and Development. These differences were also reflected in what people did and in the decisions individuals had made about participating in the new opportunities provided by the University and the Faculty, e.g. to apply for research funds, to design new courses or to work part-time for TDS. Some staff perceived other options as more important.

Several studies shaped this research and the questions that were asked by the researcher.

In May 1990, a small Faculty committee had conducted a survey of forty staff about their 'concerns' related to amalgamation. These concerns about change were grouped according to whether they impacted on 'self' 'task' or 'clients' (Hall & Hord, 1987; Schaafsma, 1989). Although the survey uncovered a wide range of 'personal' concerns, only a few staff expressed concern about the 'impact' of UTS on clients. The one exception was the concern about the relocation of the library and the impact this would have on their students. In fact the findings suggested a wide diversity of 'task' concerns related to perceived changes expected in work practices (e.g. new administrative procedures, new focus on research, new expectations associated with teaching practices, etc.).

"University academics", according to Harman (1989, p. 1), "display a high degree of internal differentiation in terms of their professional interests, diverse roles and divided loyalties." Based on their perceptions of these differences in professional loyalties at Melbourne University, Harman proposed four ideal types of academics. The four types were: Research leaders, Individual scholars, Artisans and Drones. This typology raised a question about a fifth ideal type operating in this Faculty - the Training Consultant.

Perceptions in the work practices of academics are bound in by their notions of 'structure' and 'agency'. 'Structure' and 'agency' represent dichotomous elements of power and control over the change process- the former embedded in the organisational bureaucracy, the latter internalised in the values and belief systems of individual academic staff and their networks (Schaafsma, 1990). These two intersecting variables have been used to explain curriculum change (Giddens, 1983) and innovation (Evans, 1988). Since joining UTS, academics found more freedom and 'agency' in decisions about what constitutes their academic work. Although the culture and 'structure' constraints of the old system have been removed and in this Faculty, concerns about new constraints have already emerged.

Networking has played an important part in facilitating recent changes, by bringing together people who shared similar values about the new direction for change.

Methodology

A non-random sample of twenty full-time academic staff members (approximately one third of the full-time Faculty) were provided with an explanatory letter and a set of eight focus questions (TABLE 1) which were used as the 'triggers' for the conversations on 'perceived changes'. Each person was interviewed once by the writer and responses were either taped or notes recorded during interview. Each conversation lasted on average about one hour.

TABLE 1 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS Q.1 THE FOCUS QUESTION: What changes have you perceived in the past two years to be significantly affecting the way you work here? Q. 2-8 RELATED QUESTIONS The remaining questions dealt with perceptions and involvement in the following: new courses; training or consultancy on a fee-for-service basis; funded research; impact of change on work practices from

amalgamation; role change & concerns about change

The Findings

Academic staff (n=20), reported that during 1989-1990, several trends impacted on their work-life that were outside the traditional functions of teaching, administration or scholarship. A summary of what they did is noted in Table 2 .

TABLE 2 ACADEMIC STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN FOUR ACTIVITIES (n=20)

DESCRIPTION	INVOLVED	NOT INVOLVED	COMMENTS
projects on a fee for service basis. of activities	16	4	Consultancy work, e.g. R & D or Covers a wide variety
conducted privately as well as for TDS. Training Workshops, provided through TDS; at UTS campus only.	13	7	Individual levels of participation varied from one to fourteen per year. (No published figures available).
Training Workshops, provided for external clients, off campus.	9	11	The data do not always differentiate between 'private' or UTS sponsored workshops.
Funded Research, either individually or as part of a team. delineate some research projects from 'development' projects. The level of funding also varies.	5	15	Difficult to

N.B. Involvement in Academic scholarship e.g. completing higher degrees (n=3) writing books (n=2), organising conferences (n=2) etc., were noted but not included here.

The perceptions by staff of what constituted 'significant changes' for them, is more difficult to summarize. This is particularly difficult in a paper of this length that draws on about twenty hours of taped conversations. The following excerpts may be explained as follows.

"Critical researchers maintain that research can legitimately look beyond the perceptions which individuals have, to the factors (often ideological) which influence such perceptions." (Candy, 1989, p.6) In the context of this institution, what were perceived to be 'significant changes' were first filtered through the public 'presentations' of staff meetings, newsletters or annual reports which allowed authority figures to impose their (ideological) definition of the 'changed' situation. In private conversations expressions of concern, statements of value or attitudes about management's commitment to these changes were perceived as ideologically based. This can only be briefly illustrated with excerpts from conversations in relation to general perceptions of change and the expanded role of Training & Development Services. General Perception of Change

"There is no longer a common core of comradeship...when we were smaller there appeared to be more camaraderie; (Now) since there is more specialization, there is less of getting together." (Lecturer, School of Adult Vocational Education)

"You have to consider the emotional side of this change. The changes in a person and the changes in my role associated with negotiating the new Masters program were fraught with tension."(Since the amalgamation) we have had to learn the new rules of the game and this sometimes created frustration and anger. There are real cultural differences between us and the other Faculties."(Masters Program Coordinator)

"I see a real improvement in the management of this Faculty; there is now clear direction, less paternalism and more freedom. However, I am concerned about the possibility of some form of staff evaluation . " (Senior Lecturer)

"You can see the impact of all these changes in the Staff Room. The lunch-time groups are getting smaller; there is less camaraderie because people are doing their own things, outside (UTS) or elsewhere." (Course Coordinator)

Perception of Research The second trend to impact on a small number of staff was the resurgence of large-scale research that was funded by outside agencies such as DEET. A small number of key staff in one School were successful in gaining significant research grants and for the first time new research staff were recruited thus adding to office congestion, and changing the 'academic staffing profile' of the Faculty by producing a new 'division' of Language and Literacy.

"We have all been given much more encouragement (by the Dean) to do outside work. There is a clearer mission to get involved in training in industry and that's what I'm doing. I don't see the traditional distinction between research and consultancy.".....Apart from writing a book, I've been involved in industry-based research. I have also developed an annotated bibliography which all staff interested in Training can use, and I believe that this does benefit the Faculty as a whole." (Lecturer in the School of Community and Work Place Education)

"No, I'm not into funded research at present but I'm doing a lot of different things outside with Summer Hill Films, Australian television School, the Metals Award and ETF, AMES and of course my regular contacts with the black eagles."(Senior Lecturer)

The third trend was the boom in Training and Development Services provided by full-time and part-time staff on the Faculty.

Perceptions of Training & Development Services

" I think the quality of my written presentations has really improved since I started writing these (TDS) modules.... of course the Mac has been a big help."I feel a bit guilty about it because I now have less time to do research and mark ...(Lecturer)

"TDS has been good to me since I started here. There is no way I could be a senior lecturer, so I decided to make the best of it.... I am not trained for research but I like presenting. I am a university lecturer, I used to be a technician!" (Lecturer)

"No, I'm no longer doing any teaching in any of the regular courses. .."The major changes that I see are the impact of producing (the Modules) on computers and producing high quality documentation using laser printers."(Marketing Director TDS)

"We have to of course pick the right people for the job (training, and/or consultancy) and so we have to go on previous expertise... More than 60% of this Faculty have been involved in some work associated with TDS, I can't tell you off hand who did what but I know more and more staff are getting involved." (Director, TDS)

The often-conflicting values, based on these new opportunities were not immediately apparent to all staff. Perceptions were often shared through existing social networks. "When I first became involved in developing courses for TDS, I believed that they would enrich our existing programs and give it an added dimension. I now think they have bailed out because people who do most of the consulting do least of the teaching." (Course Coordinator, School of Adult and Language Education)

"There are a number of us here who feel we are out of the opportunities, out of TDS and in fact are left out ." ".....I see this as polarizing this Faculty ." (Senior Lecturer)

"The hard-nosed rationalism of the 80's obviously affects work here. I find I now work in a university influenced by Canberra's model of 'efficiency' rather than 'effectiveness'. This 'entrepreneurial' thing is a concern for me, just like it is a concern in TAFE." (Acting Head of School)

Conclusion

The shift from traditional educational pursuits in this Faculty of Adult Education to innovations in training, consultancy and industry-based research are professionally exciting and (financially) rewarding for those who participate. This trend may well become institutionalised as the taken-for-granted way we work around here. If so, there will be less time for collegiality, program development meetings, academic scholarship and the traditional relationships with adult learners. As one member of staff poignantly reflected on the pace of recent changes, "The rats will just have to run a lot faster in their maze."

This action research study has suggested that there are enough signs already that the changes described here will have an impact on the quality of my teaching, the value attached to scholarship (e.g. PhD's) and indeed the nature of the job that I do as an academic. Perhaps a new ideal type of academic is emerging - the Educational Entrepreneur. It appears there are already a significant number of colleagues who share my concerns about this trend.

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