

The New Higher Education Worker

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Introduction

This paper explores the connections between economic rationalism, managerialism and the intensification of academic work. We are particularly interested in the tendency to attribute work intensification solely to economic rationalism and managerialism and consequential attempts to reconstruct organisationally the tenets of a previous academic culture. It argues that these directions are mistakenly identified as new and appropriate directions for universities in the 1990's.

Economic Rationalism and Managerialism

There is little doubt that the Australian higher education sector since the late 1980's has been progressively attuned to the national (economic) interest' in research funding policy, in the establishment of the Committee for the Advancement of Higher Education (CAUT) in 1992 and in the current drive to establish quality' profiles and indicators. These global trends (Handy, 1987; Wexler, 1988; Wasser, 1990) put a premium on productivity, efficient uses of resources and value-for-money so that the role of management via a managerial ideology' has dominated universities in recent years (Pollitt, 1990; Pusey, 1992). Peters (1992: 127) has commented:

What we can say, without doubt, is that we have witnessed a fundamental change in the political ideology in higher education, a change that will set the parameters within which higher education is to be conceived and practised for a considerable period to come. Underlying the change is the call for a greater productivity and for improved efficiency and effectiveness.

Following Schuller (1990), the new elements which have impinged on university governance and academic practice in the 1980-90's can be summarised as:

(i) reduction in public funding to institutions leading to first contraction, then expansion at reduced cost per EFTSU. This development has placed heavy emphasis on alternative funding sources, accountability and market responsiveness as both academics and institutions seek to cope with these new conditions.

(ii) diversification and expansion of higher education to account for the collapse of the youth labour market, the demand for higher degrees and the search for market niches' in areas such as new spheres of knowledge, continuing education and sub-degree

programs.

(iii) central government attempts to tie higher education to the national interest' via so-called wealth production' needs so that financial pressures have been applied to higher education to become more business-like'.

These trends indicate an increased growth of, and role for, the state in higher education. As Smart (1991) and Lingard (1991) have shown, the Australian state has moved in a flexible way to achieve its educational goals. Under the National Unified System established in 1988-89, the federal government controls agreed profiles, the funding model and the competitive bidding process while leaving management and internal distribution of resources to the institutions. In turn, the management and internal distribution of resources are highly sensitive to specific

funding mechanisms such as the research and training agendas of the federal government and to accountability arrangements (Marginson, 1993: 125-6). Underlying the public sector accountability arrangements is a belief in the use of market forces to induce greater efficiency (Peters, 1992: 127).

Such mechanisms are embedded in the demand pressures on higher education. Between 1983 and 1991, higher education enrolments increased by 29% with a projected increase of a further 13% by 2001. Even so, the estimated unmet demand for higher education in 1992 was 34,000 - 49,700 (Trinca, cited in Marginson, 1993: 89). During the 1983 - 1991 period, the percentage of national wealth dedicated to education fell from 5.7% to 4.2% with a projected decline to 3.5% in 2001 (Bates, 1992). Simultaneously, salaries for teachers and academics have declined as a percentage of average weekly earnings. Pusey's (1991, 1993) analysis shows how the new agendas ultimately affect cultural values, social conventions as well as central elements of national identity. It would be surprising if such measures, coupled with micro-economic reform, did not affect work practices across the higher education sector. While there has been relatively little attention paid to the intensification of work in higher education, the trends in school teaching provide a reference point.

Work Environment

In the school system, educational reforms' such as the de-centralised, collegial self-managing' school has meant that teachers spend extraordinary hours doing administrative and other non-teaching related tasks (Seddon, 1991; Preston, 1992). Similarly, in the universities, academic work is intensified by the internal redistribution of resources generated by institutional attempts to fulfil profile requirements with

diminished staff and increasing centralised surveillance. The pressure to maintain and increase student enrolments while fulfilling expectations to perform' better for continuation and promotion procedures, create difficulties for individual academics (Porter et al, 1993). In particular, the urgency to undertake higher degrees and research has fallen especially on former CAE staff who were primarily recruited and promoted on the basis of teaching (Williams, 1992: 287).

While change has been a constant feature of higher education (Taylor, 1987), a discernible effect of the intensification of academic work is a perceived decline of what is referred to as collegial' activity, thought by many to be the core of academic culture and practices. There are several emergent tendencies which reinforce a change in academic culture away from the complex of values centred on collegiality.

A prime element, as in the rest of the economy, is the increasing division between a core of permanent staff and a periphery of marginal workers in the academic labour force. The former have security while the latter are employed on a part-time basis with little or no discernible occupational career path. In addition, permanent staff, compared to part-timers, are relatively well-paid.

Part-time work as a category is broad in its application, ranging from weekly hours to contract work which falls only just short of permanent'. What is clear however is that part-time work is not a staging point for tenure. The point is that the university community' is increasingly a small elite of conversationalists' flanked by substantial numbers of predominantly women temporary teachers, contract researchers and others whose dead-lines are short (Schuller, 1990: 5). The idea of a university community' of equals is suspect in this scenario.

A further outcome of the intensification of academic work is the skewing of the reward structure. People doing the same work -- teaching and research --- are rewarded differently. In addition, with the increasing use of differential pay packages in universities and different conditions of employment which allow for consultancies and other remunerative rewards, commitment to ideals of a community are further weakened. The apparent career path of marginal workers in this scenario, despite the recent academic industrial award, is arduous if for no other reason that most peripheral workers are employed to teach. As we argue later, this is a fatal focus for aspiring academics, even under the new-found interest in teaching at the national and institutional levels.

Similarly, consultancy and contract work diminishes the idea of an academic community'. Such work raises issues of control and autonomy. It affects the types of problems that scholars pursue in two ways. It draws them away from serious problems that have few immediate pay-offs and from those problems that afflict people who cannot afford to pay consultants. As Guttman (1987: 198-99) argues, consultancy and contract work provide freedom for academics to pursue their interests but in doing so, is less likely to sustain the collective autonomous scholarship which forms a defence against political control of ideas. In this way, consultancies and contracts weaken university ideals about scepticism towards the conventional wisdom of society (Annan, 1970: 467) by lessening the possibility of universities acting as socially sanctioned sites of dissent.

Moreover, in large cities, as cost constraints on plant and utilities increase, the nature of industrial structures may change. Already in some places, it is proposed that university staff be present on site for lesser periods (Schuller, 1990). In such cases, staff contracted on an internal consultancy basis for a specific amount of teaching and research so will have less time for the interchange that supposedly holds the university community' together. This is one of the implications of the intensification of academic work, the fuller utilisation of university capital, human and physical.

Furthermore, external consultancies which generate income affect the internal fiscal operations of universities as those elements who produce it seek resources that sustain or expand the capacity to do so. Such pressures detract from the sense of community and common purpose. Schuller's (1990: 7) conclusion is that consultancies and contract work signal a significant shift in the prevailing conceptions of what university academic work is, particularly as the shift from knowledge as a process to knowledge as a product for audit purposes accelerates (Scott, 1984).

The punishing work environment of the evolving university system, relatively poor remuneration in comparison with other occupations and lack of clearly tenured opportunities, are bound to have their effects on university recruitment. It might be predicted that universities will face what Kerr (1983: 530) has observed of school teaching:
values.

Some empirical evidence

Before proceeding and by way of testing the discussion so far, we draw on a university-wide survey study of university life conducted by Bond et al (1993). This study collected information

about work conditions, teaching and research across a major urban institution which has in recent years grappled with the

difficulties of amalgamating several previously non-university elements. The examples are intended to exemplify the changing nature of academic relations resulting in the progressive alienation of academic staff.

Teaching

Teaching is a major aspect of work for 92% (N= 375) of the target university's academics. Its significance is underlined by the importance placed on a desire for further training in teaching reported in the survey. Bond et al (1993: 25) make the point that academics are especially sensitive to the changing nature of higher education and the characteristics of cohorts of students new to the universities.

The contemporary conditions of higher education are underlined by the teaching issues' identified by academics in the survey. Heavy teaching loads and insufficient support for teaching were nominated by 14% of the sample (N= 409) and of these, 71% were junior staff. Reported comments indicate that academics are bearing the costs of reduced funding and pressure to maintain or increase student numbers. Work conditions are characterised by (I)ncreasing teaching loads -primarily as a consequence of cuts in part-time teaching resources ...', large classes and high contact hours. There is concern also about the effects of heavy teaching loads on future prospects, thus:

Too much teaching ... in relation to what is considered to be important for promotions ...'; and There is never an opportunity for uninterrupted research time of a sustained nature'

While pressures to teach' more are felt by staff, it is also perceived that teaching is undervalued and unrecognised (Bond et al, 1993: 31), exemplified by: There is not enough support for teaching activities. The administrative support hinders, not enhances, academic endeavours'; and More acknowledgment of the needs associated with course development especially with regard to time'

Research

Research is regarded as a major aspect of academic work by 74% of the sample (N=302), with expressed needs for assistance evident in the more junior members of staff, especially in the newly amalgamated faculties (Bond et al, 1993: 37). The authors of the report comment that: ... staff perceived the need to perform well in the research area ... However, the realities of a large workload in one or more areas tended to intervene' (Bond, et al, 1993: 47). As one respondent put it:

Another observes:

Administration

Forty-two percent of the sample identified some form of administration as a major aspect of their work. The academics in this survey perceive that they are doing too much of it and in contrast, that administration overwhelms teaching and research. Thus, The University always seems to act as if its administrative activities, requests, demands etc should take precedence over scholarly activities, and this can be very frustrating and stressful'. More bluntly, 'Top down' management policies which create anger, misunderstanding, and paranoia among staff who feel no ownership of changes'

Echoing Middlehurst and Elton (1992), Bond et al (1993: 76) remark that (t)here is a perception that the University is driven by its administrative processes rather than its other functions, and in particular those of teaching and research.'

It is perhaps not surprising that Bond et al (1993: 79 ff) report academics are frustrated by, and angry about, both their own professional progress and managerial pressures on their work. They are particularly concerned about what they perceive to be unclear and changing criteria for appointments, tenure and promotion, job security and equity. These concerns are the background to work in the contemporary university.

Within the general framework mapped so far, it is evident that academics in the survey are worried about the clash between what they perceive to be traditional' generic university values and those of an emergent university culture. The particular expressions within the specific institution can be taken as symptomatic of the whole sector. Remarks about retreat from scholarship and the impact of economic rationalism on scholarly activity in the form of diminished resources, and fears that the university' will lose its status, indicate that academics feel themselves under threat.

Image of Academic Management

An important ingredient of the perceived threat is the recurrent contrast between an implicit image of a generalised university' and the perceived effects of economic rationalist policies and managerialist forms of administration on it. On the one hand, while definitions of the university' are diverse (Jaspers, 1960;

Schuller,1990), the implicit model resembles a series of communities held together by a common name, a common governing board, and related purposes' (Kerr, 1963: 1).

The idea of the university as a community' of autonomous individuals governed by collegial values centred on teaching for instance, is certainly an historical myth (Smith, 1989: 217). Even if this were not the case, changes in the nature of academic employment and the material circumstances of universities render the image increasingly inaccurate' both as an account of current practice and implausible as a view of the future (Schuller,1990: 4).

On the other hand, the pace and time-scales of change' in academic work are accelerating in what Whitty (1993) calls a neo-Fordist age. It is tempting then to reinvent earlier debates by seeking explanations of the correspondence between macro-economic policies and consequential pressures on academic work (Whitty, 1993). Again, it is tempting to also argue that emergent patterns of university administration are a reflection of short-term adaptive managerial behaviour, rather than a long term structural tendency (Pollert, 1987), thus avoiding the big picture' (Ozga, 1990).

Our concern is with the tendency to blame economic rationalism' and managerialism' uncritically for present practices and trends because they endanger historical, professional achievements defined by the image described earlier. This jeopardy thesis' (Hirschman, 1991) often leads to proposals for models of university governance which pay scant attention to the structural relationships between universities, the state and civil society or the ideological constructions of academic practices. We now explore these notions further.

Management and Academia

Many commentators have indicated how managerialist, business-like management models do not fit academic life (eg Bates, 1992). Cohen and March (1986) have explored eight different models of governance that do not rely on business images and seem more appropriate to a collegial, community-like environment. Birnbaum (1988) for example, argues that distributed rational decision-making and spontaneous corrective action' between academics working harmoniously within a common culture, is the most appropriate for higher education and indeed business and industry. We are sceptical of this approach on the grounds that it does not solve the occupational problems of higher education staff.

First, academic units such as departments and faculties and individual academics within them, are largely concerned with

competition. Academic life is, and has always been, inseparable from matters of resources and their distribution in the search for reputational work. At the individual staff member level, there is competition for resources, grants and positions. Specialisation and changes in the nature of knowledge put strains on individual academics to look outside academic units and the institution for intellectual partnerships. Academic units jostle for shares of centrally allocated funds for research and teaching. Under contemporary funding arrangements, they not only seek sufficient students to fill profile requirements, but also

the best of them.

What is relatively focused now in universities is the explicit press for reputational work that benefits the institution. Universities recognise that there is an emergent ranking of institutions on a centrality/marginality continuum. The ranking is tied to prestige which in turn affects the guaranteed continuity and saleability of professional services within a market orientation determined by the state and civil society. These circumstances directly challenge the notions of interdependent academic exchange within a collective, scholarly culture. In the emergent university structure, relations are better understood as individualised, bilateral, competitive and monetarised (Schuller, 1990: 9). Such relations challenge the right of university professionals --- who standardise the production of professional producers --- to defend the universalistic guarantees of professional competence in ways that legitimate their own claims of autonomy and monopoly (Larson, 1977; 34). Moreover, as Larson (1977: 227) and Rice (1986) argue, they challenge the ideological construction of a career' tied to an essential dimension of the self, which is as resilient as that in medicine.

Second, while it is possible to conceive of collegially organised academic units, they operate within an administrative and management structure, processes and agreed objectives (Kotter, 1990) associated with the question 'who is in charge here?' (Birnbaum, 1988). Thus, 'administration' has the connotation of policy implementation within a framework of established systems, rules and procedures (Kotter, 1988), including those set by 'collegial' decision-making. While it is difficult to separate academic and administrative activity, the latter serves the purposes of either academic leadership or management.

'Collegiality' then can mean that there is a need for increased numbers of administrative staff, thus detracting from academic resource allocation, or academics are called on to do more administrative work. Many academics recognise the advantages of

avoiding administrative work and attend only those meetings or seminars that directly bear on their own reputational academic work. Fox's (1992: 302) national study of social scientists in the United States, confirms the view that ideas, the laboratory, the library and external funding are more important for active researchers than people, teaching, faculty meetings and internal budgets.

Third, Middlehurst and Elton (1992: 255) point out that 'transactional' leadership is inadequate where radical or urgent change is required in circumstances of external shock and unacceptable levels of intra-institutional performance. In these circumstances, collegial management practices may not be the interests of either academics or the institution and in turn, students. External shocks' were faced by Australian universities in the 1980's and continue to be faced by them in the 1990's. They take the form of priority setting against system and institutional financial stringency and the linking of levels of institution and individual performance to quality audits.

These conditions require 'proactive leadership' supported by competent management and a division of the institutional system into sub-systems. However, where institutions or sub-systems within them perceive themselves to be in survival mode, strong 'institutional management' to initiate and maintain rapid procedural and structural changes seem to be required, no matter what the institution (Middlehurst and Elton, 1992: 257). In the new universities, there is a sharp edge to 'survival mode' as

individuals and institutions attempt to reach base-levels in qualifications and performance. Middlehurst and Elton (1992: 257) hypothesise that under 'survival' conditions, academics will become progressively alienated', that academic goals will suffer and that academic standards will drop. The data contained in the Bond et al (1993) study lend weight to the first of these hypotheses.

We propose then that the fact of a cybernetic model of governance does not ensure that academics will be free of managerial-type constraints within the sub-systems of the work-place of a university. It may well engender academic cohesiveness and commitment to discipline areas and interests at the teaching and research level of the organisation. Such models still require bureaucratic administrative procedures in key resource areas, especially in developing a corporate image, while providing for collegiality in academic matters on the part of an academic society of equals (Scott, 1984: 56). But the problem of the conflict of interests between academic loyalties, institutional and governmental goals, which seems to be long-term condition of

the university sector, remains. There is compelling evidence (see Bendix, 1956: 136 for the continuity of this concern) that such organisational structural problems are endemic to large institutions in which expert professionals are embedded, whatever the macro-economic conditions of the day.

Teaching and Research

With this discussion in mind, we raise two final points about most contentious area of academic work in the new institutions: the demands for research profiles and higher research-based degrees for confirmation and promotion purposes.

The first is the realisation by many academics that the goal posts have shifted' in so far as the requisites for confirmation and promotion are highly dependent on research and higher degrees. Many staff now in universities may have been hired to teach but find that professional rewards are dependent on doing research. There is a sense in which teaching is a job' while research is an academic's work' so that teaching is a necessary but not a sufficient criterion for the improvement of institutional status or individual prestige (Fox, 1992: 302). This realisation, when teaching loads are unrelenting and resources are scarce, increases the intensity of academic work as the extracts cited earlier demonstrate.

This brings us to our second point. It is that it is a convenient myth to explain academic work-load, work conditions and the demands for advanced qualifications and research,' solely by the deprivations of managerialist administrative practices and economic rationalist policies. As Bourdieu (1985: 137) remarks in another context, practices such as managerialism / economic rationalism and their effects are given meaning and value by a universe of believers, in this case, by those whose experiences are painful.

By treating experience' as an explanatory rather than a descriptive idea, the effects of the myth are to shift the gaze of some university staff away from theory, practice and analysis appropriate for dealing with a new political situation. On the one hand, a crucial element of this scenario is that while collegiality' and community' may seem to be appropriately antithetical to the acquisitive, economic rationalist society and the managerialist institution, professions are always defined by their elites, by the central power structure of the society' (Larson, 1977: 226-227). The most prestigious universities, departments and academics continue to teach, research and consult

with the very agencies which are perceived to be threatening academics. They foster the apparent emergence of a hierarchy of

teaching and research institutions, despite the output of scholarly work critical of economic rationalism and managerialism. The seemingly new performance-based agenda is fundamentally that which has always characterised the liberal university.

It has long been recognised in these institutions that institutional structures have effects on individuals that cannot be predicted from individual characteristics alone (Blau, 1960; Lazarsfeld and Menzel, 1972: 227-229). Institutional factors, rather than individual characteristics, are as relevant as any other factor in determining research productivity rates (Platt, 1988: 523). Long and McGinnis (1981: 439) for example have shown that there are strong and significant statistical contextual effects on the publication rates of biochemists such that within three to six years of obtaining a position, a scientist's productivity conforms to the characteristics of the context.

It follows then that if the global, contextual features of the institution are conducive to research and teaching and good work is done, then new people entering the situation should do good work, and enjoy it, because of the favourable conditions. Conversely, less conducive institutional contexts are likely to affect academic work. This is why the traditional universities are concerned about their infrastructure in the present circumstances.

But it also follows, Platt (1988: 525) points out, that if people only do the kind of work for which their age, experience and ability fits them, then it does not matter what the institutional context is like. Platt's proposition appears to be supported by Hattie's (1990: 265) study of performance indicators in Australian university education departments and faculties that shows the strong statistical relationships between publications in refereed journals and percentage of PhD students and percentage of staff with PhD's in an academic department.

Hattie's findings suggest that people interested in, and prepared for, research will undertake it regardless of age, size of department, number of staff or research monies (see also Platt, 1988: 519). In a national study of academic work of social science staff in the United States, Fox (1992: 299-300) reports that with teaching load constant, faculty who publish more have a higher interest in research than teaching and the effect increases with the degree granting level of the department.

Moreover, Fox (1992: 301) concludes that:
variables are competitive, not complementary.

This is why strategic staffing has always been a major concern of

the traditional universities.

Such research also suggests that economic rationalism / managerialism may not produce strong negative occupational effects if academic performance is judged by a research productivity criterion. To this extent, some university academic staff may be under work pressure primarily because resource constraints partially restrict what they have always done with their expertise and professional knowledge. For others, however, the redefinition of university work causes personal turmoil by the demand to change what they have always done and such pressure coincides with resource constraints.

On the other hand, the predisposition to ignore or misrecognise

the transformation of the university sector and its relations with civil society, does not specify the link between the university system and the occupational practices of academics. It simply fails to penetrate the constraints and possibilities of organisation and compartmentalised academic culture which have always created special privileged work conditions in universities. Consequently, the potential to reconstruct the knowledge-base and social practices of the traditional university are dissipated in the present period of dis-organisation and uncertainty. Anthropomorphic causal doctrines and ethical pleas for forms of humanist psychology to save academics from the new agendas are substituted for analysis and political action. Yet, the conventional notion of fitting academic work practices into pre-existing teaching / research and thought patterns is historically outmoded and even more suspect now than previously.

We conclude by suggesting that there is serious analytic work to be done on universities and their work structures. If individual characteristics affect staff work conditions and perceived aspirations, then research on policy initiatives aimed at the composition of academic units and recruitment are urgently required. If global, institutional characteristics are crucial, then research on management and support structures are required so that a new form of university emerges from the turmoil of the 1990's.

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