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Academic manager or managed academic? Academic identity schisms in higher education

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The relationship between values and academic identity has received scant attention in the higher education literature with some notable exceptions (Churchman, 2006; Harley, 2002; Henkel, 2005). This paper contends that the perceived need to align all academics around corporate values and goals has given rise to academic identity schisms in higher education. Central to the academic identity schism is the notion of person–organisation values fit and the degree to which the ideologies and values of academics are *congruent* (the 'academic manager') or *incongruent* (the 'managed academic') with the prevailing discourse of corporate managerialism. To reduce the prevalence of academic disengagement and make it easier for academic managers to gain the support of the managed, the paper proposes two inter-related strategies for bridging identity schisms in academe.

Keywords: academic identity; corporate managerialism; values systems

Introduction

In recent years, managerialism, or new public management as it is known in the public sector, has reshaped all aspects of academic work and identity around an idealised image of corporate efficiency, a strong managerial culture, entrepreneurialism, and profit-making ideals (By, Diefenbach & Klarner, 2008; Chandler, Barry & Clark, 2002; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2008). This paper contends managerialism has led to an identity schism in the academic workplace as denoted by the identities of 'academic manager' (values *congruent* with the managerial discourse) and 'managed academic' (values *incongruent* with the managerial discourse). In the former case, academic managers have internalised values and constructed goals and working patterns that reflect the imperatives of a corporate management system, such as strong hierarchical management, budgetary control, income maximisation, commercialisation and performance management indicators (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2008). In the latter case, managed academics have defended and promoted distinctive accounts of their own professional identity and that of the institution by invoking values of self-regulation, collegial practice and educational standards (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Churchman, 2006; Randle & Brady, 1997). Lost in this fractured work environment are values that broaden, transcend or unify disparate conceptions of what is central, distinctive and enduring about higher education (Scott, 2004).

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Drawing from studies of the changing academic role in response to corporate managerialism within UK (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; By, Diefenbach & Klarner, 2008; Chandler, Barry & Clark, 2002; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2008) and Australian (Churchman, 2006; Sharrock, 2000; Szekeres, 2006; Winter & Sarros, 2002) higher education, this paper identifies divisions in academic identity based on conflicting professional and managerial work ideologies and values systems. Central to the identified identity schism is the notion of values fit and organisational situations in which academics and managers' ideological beliefs and values may not overlap in respect to the roles and obligations of academics and the primary purpose of the institution (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Parker & Jary, 1995). It is proposed such values incongruence can emerge when academics are engaged in academic work that embodies corporate ideologies, values and practices (e.g. profit-making activities, serving the needs of 'customers') that conflict with a 'central, valued and salient [professional] self' (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p. 99). In this context, the 'epithet "professional" is not merely an occupational category but a valued self-identity that implies both commitment and skill' (Parker & Jary, 1995, p. 328). Hence, at the heart of the identity schism is the notion of *professional identity* (Nixon, 1996) and the extent to which an academic seeks to separate her/his *inner* professional self from an *outer* organisational self that privileges commercial principles and practices and enhances the role and importance of the academic manager.

This paper begins by explaining the relationship between values and identity, and highlighting how managerialism has led to a distinct identity change in higher education. Next, schisms in academic identities are revealed in the context of how academics experience and respond to managerialism as a process of ideological reform (Deem & Brehony, 2005). On the basis of incongruent managerial and professional ideologies, academic manager and managed academic identities are contrasted. Finally, strategies are proposed to bridge identity schisms in academe.

Values and identity change in higher education

Values have intrinsic meaning and importance to all members of an organisation. As core cognitive beliefs, values transcend specific situations and serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Schwartz, 1994). Values not only help mould a person's long-term preferences and behaviour, they are central to defining the identity of a person (Kluckhohn, 1951) and organisation (Albert & Whetten, 1985). In universities, perhaps the 'most value-laden institutions in modern society' (Scott, 2004, p. 439), values such as collegial governance, institutional autonomy and academic freedom have a long tradition of defining the essential elements of academic and university identities. Indeed, values predicated on John Newman's (1960) *Idea of a University* as first and foremost a place of learning, a community of educated persons 'devoted to the pursuit of intellectual truth, as an end in itself, and, as such, fulfilling a central and ethical role for society at large' act as an important glue that holds both the academic and institution together (Coady, 2000, p. 6).

Identity refers to the enduring beliefs, values, motives and experiences that are characteristic of individuals who enact the same professional role (Ibarra, 1999). As academics enact their professional roles, they are influenced by academic (traditional) and managerial (contemporary) identities and the contradictions and conflicts that arise from these competing identity claims (Henkel, 2000; Parker & Jary, 1995; Winter & Sarros, 2002). Academic identity refers here to the extent to which an individual defines themselves primarily in terms of the organisation (and their position of managerial authority) or as a member of a profession (Ibarra, 1999; Raelin, 1986). Although academics may have both

an *administrative* and a *professional* identity, it is argued managerialism creates the values-based conditions by which individuals seek to align themselves with the enterprise (managerial identity) or to separate their academic selves from the demands of a corporate enterprise (professional identity). Processes of values alignment (values congruence) and values separation (values incongruence) are seen as integral to academic identity formation (Foreman & Whetten, 2002).

Academic identity is premised on ideological rewards, such as the value of discipline scholarship, intellectual curiosity, a community of practice, accountability to peers and professional autonomy (Ramsden, 1998). Central to academic identity is the notion of academic professionalism and the established practice of professional training that equips academics with the requisite skills and values to self-regulate their job performance (O'Neill & Meek, 1994). These beliefs, norms and values are enshrined in discipline-based work structures that govern the content and process of academic work (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Organisational statements or managerial actions that are perceived to run counter to these 'cherished ideals' are defended rigorously by academics, as they are often central to the person's professional autonomy, status and identity (Nixon, 1996; Parker & Jary, 1995).

As higher education institutions contrived themselves in market-oriented, utilitarian terms in response to an altered economic environment of public funding constraints, user-pays principles, full-fee paying courses and research directly tied to business needs, academics internalised business-related values and profit-making ideals (Henkel, 1997; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Winter & Sarros, 2002). An important transformation mechanism for this identity change was the promotion and legitimisation of an ideology based on economic and managerialist notions (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2008). Indeed, managerialism and its associated ideologies, values and interests reshaped the nature of universities, making them into producers of commodities that consumers (students) may choose to demand depending on their competing preferences and the institution's perceived brand image. Under these business-like arrangements, academics are required to enact academic work in terms of a performance management agenda and, as a consequence, provide regular evidence to managers and their institutions of the contribution they are making to research targets (Harley, 2002) and the satisfaction rendered to customers (Sharrock, 2000). The ideology of market-based rationality is so strong that for many academics any deviation from such a norm of work is considered fanciful, steeped in a bygone age, or insular and ignorant of the competitive and financial realities facing universities today.

In an environment of corporate managerialism, academic identity is increasingly tied to 'the management of student learning' (Henkel, 1997, p. 138) and the delivery of 'real world' vocational business-related courses (Harley, 2002, p. 189). Traditional academic values of professional autonomy and collective ideals are squeezed out and marginalised in favour of a managerial identity that is 'governed by values of economic rationality, the primacy of profit, and the minimisation of cost' (Albert & Whetten, 1985, pp. 281–282). As flexible facilitators and assessors within a corporate hierarchical structure, academics are expected to internalise the importance of student numbers, grant income, prestige journal rankings and institutional league tables as market signals of the success and prestige of *their* institutions. As universities shed their collegiate skins and take on more corporate customer-focused suits, academics are being called upon to 'operate within more open and contested arenas', not to rely on assumed rights, and get used to managing a 'greater variety of relationships within and beyond the academic world' (Henkel, 2005, p. 170). Recent research into shifting identities in higher education suggests some blurring of academic and managerial identities as professional managers undertake 'blended' or

'quasi-academic roles, such as managing student transitions or regional partnerships' (Whitchurch, 2008, p. 3). However, it remains to be seen whether shifting identities among general managers and specialist professional staff not on academic contracts translates to the heartland of academic staff carrying out prescribed teaching and research functions within discipline units (Henkel, 2000; Winter & Sarros, 2002).

Schisms in academic identities

Higher education institutions are places shaped by conflicting professional and managerial work ideologies and organising logics (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Parker & Jary, 1995; Randle & Brady, 1997). Because institutions attempt to sustain traditional academic cultures while simultaneously promoting and developing corporate ideologies and structures, they are characterised by a multiple or hybrid identity (Foreman & Whetten, 2002). As identities are not unitary and fixed but pluralistic and fluid, there exists the context for different expectations and discourses as to: (1) the roles, rights, and obligations of academics (e.g. academics as autonomous professionals; academics as managed employees); and (2) the nature and purpose of the institution (e.g. a crucible of learning and education; a profit-making enterprise).

Two examples of UK further education colleges illustrate schisms in academic identities in respect to the nature and purpose of the institution. In one college, senior management defined the college as a business and conceived of one teaching site as a 'unit of resource to be managed' (Brown & Humphreys, 2006, p. 240). Lecturing staff on the other hand 'subscribed to a view of the college as an educational institution focally concerned with pedagogy, and emphasised the importance (and joys) of teaching and learning' (p. 240). In this place of contested identity, neither group could 'grasp the importance of constructing a multi-vocal college identity that incorporated disparate agendas and ideals' (Brown & Humphreys, 2006, p. 249). A similar identity schism was evident in Randle and Brady's (1997) study of the introduction of flexible learning and market-related mechanisms into a large college. Interviews with college managers and academic staff indicated each group perceived quality differently. Managers viewed quality in terms of conformance to budgetary targets, whereas academic staff stressed the importance of pedagogical standards and regarded quality assurance measures as 'merely fruitless and irksome' (Randle & Brady, 1997, p. 235).

In Australian universities, as unitary business values and practices permeate all operating functions, schisms in academic identity have emerged (Churchman, 2006; Szekeres, 2006; Winter & Sarros, 2002). Instead of viewing the university as a business and engaging in commercial activities that benefit all members of the organisation, some academic staff 'construct and protect their individual academic identity' which 'correspond[s] with their understandings of the [changed] academic role' (Churchman, 2006, p. 7). This is inherently frustrating for university administrators, as they recognise the fiscal strains on universities and grasp the 'fact that the university needs to be run like a business' (Szekeres, 2006, p. 137). Academics, on the other hand, often resist these commercial imperatives and voice misgivings at having to view students as customers and courses as products (Sharrock, 2000; Winter & Sarros, 2002). Indeed, lecturers may express *values incongruence* and feelings of disengagement when they see a managerial identity compromising a professional identity of teaching, learning and scholarship:

> The university system is being cynically attacked. Although there are inefficiencies and some poor performers, mechanisms used to redress these problems are inappropriate. Education is mis-specified as a 'commodity' or 'product'. Research cannot be measured best by publication counting. Students are not customers and do not always know best; universities are not an

'industry'. I feel what I value about university education is not valued by university administrators and policy makers. (Winter & Sarros, 2002, p. 96)

The need for universities to be more entrepreneurial in seeking funding greatly erodes not only job satisfaction, but seriously undermines a quality education system. Mostly this is in the form of content – the eradication of critical analysis in favour of courses designed to appeal to the untutored demands of business and the misguided perceptions of 'consumers'. (Winter & Sarros, 2002, p. 97)

Schisms in academic identity surface whenever academic work is reorganised around values and interests that 'violate traditional academic values' (Harley, 2002, p. 187). This is clearly evident in the UK in academics' perceptions and responses to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a bureaucratically imposed system of peer review that links academic and institutional status and identity to government funding. Responses to the RAE from academics in both 'old' and 'new' (ex-polytechnic) university departments indicated professors and heads of department 'were almost twice as likely to be happy about RAE-led changes than the rank and file' (Harley, 2002, p. 193). Senior managers in UK universities have enthusiastically embraced the RAE because it provides a means of securing institutional status in an environment of severe resource constraints. Senior academic researchers have generally supported the RAE because they feel it leads to more research and publication. In a competitive marketplace, research and publication is central to carving out a reputation whereby individual 'stars' can win high rewards and packages from prospective employers. On the other hand, academics that express negative feelings about the RAE tend to mention the *degree of emphasis* placed on research activities and its divisive 'negative impact on the status of teaching' (Harley, 2002, p. 196). According to Harley, 'universities have become sites of contested identity' whereby the 'research-active are defined as "unproductive" in relation to the "real" work of teaching and the necessity to do administration' while the 'research-active are given grounds for dismissing the less active as disgruntled individuals with a personal axe to grind' (2002, p. 203).

Finally, analyses of the changing practices and ideals of academic work in UK universities indicate strong divisions between academic managers and academics not in management roles 'despite the fact that manager-academics have actually mostly previously worked as academics' (Deem & Brehony, 2005, p. 226). These divisions not only reflect positions of managerial authority as entrenched in the university hierarchy (Cassidy, 1998), but also the extent to which academics themselves have internalised managerial ideologies as a means of using the 'power and dominance it affords for their own purposes, including status and future careers' (Deem & Brehony, 2005, p. 229). A recent article by By, Diefenbach and Klarner (2008), which reviews the adoption of managerialism in European higher education institutions, articulates the depth of hostility felt towards academics advocating managerialism for their own ends:

The rise of the audit culture and managerialism have arguably been exploited by some individuals in the sector for purposes of self-promotion and preservation as it has created an opportunity for cronyism, rent-seeking and organisational psychopathic behaviour. In this sense, the main purpose of managerialism is to increase the authority, privileges and influence of power and career-oriented managers (p. 23).

Academic manager and managed academic identities

By construing academic identity in terms of incongruent managerial and professional ideologies (Raelin, 1986), and accepting that people tend to internalise and exhibit ideological

beliefs and values that fit the larger organisation (Kristof, 1996), it is possible to identify the identities of 'academic manager' and 'managed academic'. An academic manager defines themselves primarily in terms of the corporate managerialism discourse represented by the larger university system (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2008). This means accepting and acting out in their positions the following principles: (1) academic managers have the legitimate right to manage other academics as subordinate employees in the interests of organisational efficiency and improved productivity; and (2) the institution's central character, continuity and success rests squarely on its corporate values and market-based rationality (Henkel, 1997, 2005). Conversely, an academic is more likely to establish his/her identity as a managed academic when he/she: (1) draws on professional, normative ideological beliefs to argue distinctive accounts of their roles as an autonomous professional; and (2) challenges the managerialism orthodoxy by suggesting alternative non-economic oriented visions of the institution and its importance (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Randle & Brady, 1997). Table 1 contrasts these two academic identity types.

Academic manager identity

The academic manager usually occupies a professorial position in the university hierarchy – a position that reflects entrenched orders of power, authority and patronage in higher education (Cassidy, 1998; Lafferty & Fleming, 2000). As a middle or line manager, the academic manager takes on a variety of managerial roles within the university, ranging from course leader to head of department and dean. Because professors (or associate professors) are 'responsible for managing budgets largely dictated by senior management', it is important they align themselves with the corporate enterprise and emphasise their managerial identities (Lafferty & Fleming, 2000, p. 260). This emphasis requires the academic manager to converse in management-speak, a language couched in the principles of the rational enterprise culture (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2008). Academic managers may effectively demonstrate their managerial credentials by engaging in the language of social division (e.g. highlighting 'active' and 'non-active' research staff), as this discourse provides a viable means of dividing and ruling staff in an environment of resource constraints. Less divisive managers may attempt to cushion staff from the negative effects of managerialism by engaging in collegiate decision making and supporting colleagues whenever they struggle for 'control of matters previously taken for granted as academic prerogative' (Henkel, 2005, p. 164).

As academic managers identify strongly with corporate managerialism and see their interests inextricably represented by it, they tend to express person–organisation fit attitudes, such as organisational loyalty, citizenship, and commitment behaviour (Kristof, 1996). These congruent attitudes may compensate for the frustrations felt at having to balance conflicting and stressful roles emanating from 'academic and administrative work;

Table 1. Academic manager and managed academic identities in the context of corporate managerialism.

Academic identity	Dominant ideology	Values in use	Relationship to managers/organisation	Values fit to organisation
Academic manager	Managerialism Unitary control	Utilitarian Universal	Assimilated/ connected	Values congruence - person–organisation fit
Managed academic	Professionalism Professional autonomy	Normative Distinctive	Subservient/ Disconnected	Values incongruence - person–organisation misfit

the flow of external demands or crises competing with strategic responsibilities; and [the] nurturing of individuals as against the need to change their departments' (Henkel, 2000, p. 243). Although academic managers are often overburdened with the sheer number of tasks they are required to manage, tensions and conflicts often do not emanate from conflicting values system. Tensions and conflicts may erupt in response to resource and teaching allocation issues, but these issues are thought to dissipate quickly if academics let managers manage and all members of academic staff accept more responsibility for current economic realities.

Managed academic identity

By contrast, the managed academic occupies a non-managerial position and has limited opportunity to influence decisions of the university (Winter, 2001). As a lecturer, the managed academic may be employed on a full-time and ongoing basis to engage in teaching and research, or be designated casual and/or sessional to act as a 'teaching servant' of the contemporary campus (Matchett, 2008, p. 21). Managed academics often emphasise their professional identities given their specialised teaching roles and discipline expertise. Hence, normative values, such as the 'importance (and joys) of teaching and learning' (Brown & Humphreys, 2006, p. 240) and knowledge for its own sake (Nixon, 1996), are stressed, as well as more distinctive values, such as 'creating knowledge, educating youth and contributing to their discipline professions' (Churchman, 2006, p. 9).

By emphasising their professional identities, managed academics develop, defend and promote distinctive accounts of their institution (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Randle & Brady, 1997). These normative narratives may invoke a righteous moral discourse of 'making a difference' in terms of student learning or reflect a collegiate identity in 'working with others towards a common cause' (Churchman, 2006, p. 10). What unites these disparate agendas is that they all focus on the managed academics' understanding of what they do at work; they also eschew an economic performance imperative that subordinates all knowledge and truth to bottom-line efficiency criteria (Winter & Sarros, 2002). In these discursive constructions of self and the institution, managed academics express *values incongruence* in respect to degree programs that have been 'dumbed down' (Clarke, 1998, p. 56), or quality issues framed in terms of meeting 'established budgetary targets' rather than in terms of 'student learning' (Randle & Brady, 1997, p. 235). For these managed academics, the institution is a place they disengage with because they express more commitment to their disciplines and less commitment to their organisation's management and business direction (By, Diefenbach & Klarner, 2008; Winter & Sarros, 2002).

Bridging identity schisms

Identity schisms in academe are gaining more traction today given the clash of values between traditional academic cultures and the modernising corporate cultures of higher education. Clearly, for the institution to move forward it must somehow reconcile these competing identity claims and acknowledge that in a hybrid professional structure neither one identity can change effectively without recognising the values of the other. On this basis, two inter-related strategies are proposed for generating greater dialogue and understanding of the values-based conditions underpinning academic work and identity. It is envisaged that this understanding will lead to a greater sensitivity to issues of great importance to academics *and* managers and these insights will contribute to the development

of a multi-vocal institutional identity that embraces rather than conceals normative values and ideals (Scott, 2004).

Generative conversation

Generative conversation is a necessary first step towards promoting a multi-vocal institutional identity. During these conversations, academic managers and managed academics learn to talk to each other in a meaningful and collaborative way (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant, 2005). Through regular interaction with each other, managers and academics establish relationships of mutuality – the foundation stones of a 'community of practice' whereby people learn to collaborate, share ideas and find solutions to common problems (Wenger, 1998). Ideally, these conversations are guided by skilled process consultants, who are able to stimulate conversation, ask purposeful questions, and surface and explore competing *and* unifying values and identities in academe (Schein, 1987). This dialogue may help build generalised membership ties based on specific issues or problems facing the institution (e.g. declining numbers of fee-paying students; widening student participation) or strengthen particularised ties based on building direct relationships and trust in university management (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies, 1998).

Such exchanges can be formal or informal. A regular timetabled forum in a meeting room involving a wide range of participants encourages face-to-face conversation about problems, such as the non-attendance of full-time students. This may surface conflicting perspectives on appropriate responses, such as penalties for non-attendance or shifts to more flexible modes of learning. Facilitators can use such differences to illustrate the interconnectedness of problems, and to demonstrate how problems cannot be solved by each group working independently. Electronic notice and discussion boards also can provide an ongoing dialogue that may be anonymous and therefore solicit more frank exchanges.

Leadership and multiple identities

As universities are characterised by multiple or hybrid identities, it makes sense for leaders to articulate several interpretations and understandings of organisational problems rather than construe all problems in terms of a unitary or corporate perspective. Such a 'complicated understanding' (Bartunek, Gordon & Weathersby, 1983, p. 273) has been proposed as the hallmark of a learning organisation in which people build capacities for challenging and modifying established behaviour (Kofman & Senge, 1993). This seems more likely to occur when university leaders connect with the academic heartland and adapt corporate principles and practices to the normative values of academics and the educational needs of universities.

As academic managers, heads of department are placed at a critical point of academic influence (Ramsden, 1998). By virtue of their positions they can encourage innovation and commercial activity (managerial values) while maintaining the importance of academic autonomy, professionalism and collegial relations (normative values). Walking this tightrope may minimise values incongruence provided that heads of department can manage the stress and strain of trying to be an effective administrator while protecting the academic autonomy and independence of academic staff and duties. Leadership development programs, such as those set up by Universities UK, could be beneficial in helping departmental heads manage these conflicting demands and directions (Contractor, 2008).

Importantly, university leaders need to be seen, through words and deeds, to understand the academic value system. A key leadership strategy is the crafting of a vision for the institution that is both acceptable and meaningful to both academic managers and managed academics. This means taking a principled stand in relation to core academic values *and* at the same time allowing for appropriate contextualisation of teaching and research activities according to current circumstances, such as funding shortfalls (Henkel, 2005). It also means securing a wide involvement of academic, administrative and general staff in a broadly defined values-based statement of what the institution and its members stand for, and what values will shape the identity of the institution in the future (Maskell & Robinson, 2002). This is perhaps more likely to occur when leaders acknowledge values differences and talk about higher education in terms of a collection of communities rather than a homogenous group united by corporate values and goals.

Conclusion

Corporate reforms to UK and Australian higher education institutions present challenges to both managers and academics. A recurrent managerial challenge will be how to achieve more administrative efficiency when facing a 'demorali[s]ed workforce with a lack of trust in, and commitment to, academia as a whole' (By, Deifenbach & Klarner, 2008, p. 32). Gaining the support of the managed may not be an easy task when academics feel managers are using managerialism for their own purposes and future careers. Academics experiencing values incongruence should also think very carefully about the relationship they want with their managers and institutions and how that relationship might be achieved in an environment of resource constraints and business development. An important strategic principle for the bridging of academic identities is the recognition that neither identity can change effectively without understanding the values of the other.

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