Academic leadership under siege: possibilities and limits of executive deanship

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Abstract

We argue in this article that translation of executive deanship into managerialism, a practice which is currently being uncritically embraced in many South African higher education institutions, is doomed to failure. It may prove disastrous to much-needed institutional rejuvenation. We contend that, given the legacy of bureaucratic or autocratic management styles under apartheid, what is needed is stronger academic and intellectual leadership. Such leadership would concentrate on changing relationships, promoting new forms of academic and scholarly socialisation, and building 'enabling' institutional identities and environments. Solutions in this line should draw on the strengths of the rich intellectual legacies of individual institutional histories and cultures, where collegial practices have gained momentum. Corporate restructuring with a mere fiscal and performativity tool-box will not do the job.

Academic leaders appear to have undergone an historical role transformation, from chief academic officer to chief executive officer. More emphasis is being placed on extramural funding, personnel decision making, and alumni relations. Increasingly, the image of an academic leader (eg department chair, dean, provost, rector, and president) as a quiet, scholarly individual is being overtaken by an executive image: an academic leader is seen as one who is politically astute and economically savvy. Some view academic leaders as doves of peace who intervene between warring factions that would otherwise cause destructive turbulence within the academic institution. Another metaphor used to describe academic leaders today is that of a dragon who drives away any internal or external forces that threaten the college. Yet another is of a diplomat who guides, inspires, and encourages people who live and work in the academic institution (Tucker & Bryan 1988). Still others feel that today's leader within the academy resembles a species with an imperilled existence ... (Walter H. Gmelch 1994).

INTRODUCTION

Once the custodians of collegiality, academic deans have now become the guardians of efficiency. The collegiate or academic leader has become more of a corporate manager. Deans are now known in many circles as 'chief executive

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officers', or, more precisely, 'executive deans'. This is not just a mere change of nomenclature. The former image of deans as scholarly leaders has been replaced by an executive image of them as 'politically astute and economically savvy' (Wolverton, M., Wolverton, M. L. & Gmelch, W. H. 1999:1–14). How this new role has been interpreted is reflected in the abundance of epithets in recent years. These range from job descriptors (academic leader, administrator, business manager, etc), to role and power-based metaphors such as 'super dean' – someone who exercises all authority within a faculty. Other metaphors include the 'dove of peace' intervening among warring factions; the 'dragon' holding internal and external threats at bay; the 'diplomat' facilitating collegial life (Tucker, A. & Bryan, R. 1988); the 'translator' or 'conveyor of interests' of different and conflicting groups; a 'boundary person' who works at the interface between various groups (Breslin, R. D. 2000); or an 'extension' of the vice-chancellor or faculty (Wolverton, M., Wolverton, M. L. & Gmelch, W. H. 1999). Even more extreme are those apocalyptic images such as 'imperiled species' (Gmelch 1994), inspired by nostalgia for the old days where deans were leaders of the collegiums.

Drawing on empirical data concerning the restructuring process at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and current analyses on organisational change in higher education, this article focuses on the changing nature of deanship in South Africa. The changes have come about in response to both internal and external environmental pressures, and in a context of increasing dominance by managerialism (Cross & Cloete; Cloete & Maasen; Cross & Ann, Kulati, Sehoole). With reference to the University of the Witwatersrand, the article addresses four critical questions: How do institutions that face particular environmental pressures respond with changes in their management structure, operational procedures and relationships, and organisational base? How do these responses shape the character and modus operandi of academic deans? What emerging patterns can be identified within the boundaries in which executive deans operate? Lastly, what implications do these boundaries have for the relationship between executive deans, on the one hand, and upper and lower level management structures plus key stakeholders (such as faculty, students and support staff) on the other?

While there has been a great deal of contestation against the advent of executive deanship, one should not ignore the potential and the range of possibilities that it has for facilitating the rehabilitation of South African universities after apartheid. As will be shown, the emphasis which executive deanship places on strategic thinking could offer a basis for dealing with inadequate mission statements and strategies in some of these institutions. Executive deanship may also deal effectively with the apathy, inertia, inefficiency and corruption behind the malfunctioning of universities. Given the declining state subsidies, the low student throughput rates, and the poor research output in some institutions or departments, we are – like many other pragmatists – tempted to embrace a higher level of performance-based, efficiency-driven and income-generating strategies. Such strategies use explicit goals and measurable targets to deal with problematic

issues. We do not suggest performativity here in its narrow sense as just setting goals and targets and the necessary performance indicators but performativity as entailing putting in place innovative strategies, recruiting suitable staff, establishing enabling strategies and procedures as well as setting in motion appropriate processes. However, in our view, this attitude does not necessarily point to a corporate model of managerialism as *the* solution, or to performativity as an end in itself. Performativity as an end rather than a means is a feature which is surprisingly often seen in South African higher education. Neither do such strategies necessarily require placing entrepreneurialism or business practice at the centre of university operational discourses. As Tucker and Bryan have indicated, '... universities are very unlike standard corporations or businesses, principles of management cannot be applied to both in the same way' (Tucker & Bryan 1988; Gmelch, Montez & Nies 2001).

Against this background, we argue that translation of executive deanship into managerialism, a practice which is currently being uncritically embraced in many South African higher education institutions, is doomed to failure. It may prove disastrous to much-needed institutional rejuvenation. We contend that, given the legacy of bureaucratic or autocratic management styles under apartheid, what is needed is stronger academic and intellectual leadership. Such leadership would concentrate on changing relationships, promoting new forms of academic and scholarly socialisation, and building 'enabling' institutional identities and environments. Solutions in this line should draw on the strengths of the rich intellectual legacies of individual institutional histories and cultures, where collegial practices have gained momentum. Corporate restructuring with a mere fiscal and performativity tool-box will not do the job.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Research on deanship has concentrated on several aspects concerning the nature, tasks and challenges faced by deans. These include the roles and responsibilities of deans; (Ketteridge *et al* 2002) their transition from teaching and research roles to management ones and vice-versa; their dilemmas in leadership; their ambivalent positions (positions of conflict) (Sarros *et al* 1998); their leadership and management skills (Alan 1999; Bolton 2000; Wolverton & Gmelch 2002; Sarros 1998) their mobility; their career paths (Bright 2001); their role in governance and decision making (Tucker & Bryan 1988); race and gender demographics (Andersen, Dale, King & Joseph 1987) and, more recently, the assessment of their effectiveness as senior managers (Rosser, Johnsrud & Heck 2003; Matczynski 1989). More important to our argument is the rising wave of critiques of the corporatisation of university management, including executive deanship. These critiques are gaining momentum in current debates on university management (Currie & Vidovich 1998; De Boer & Huisman 1999:7; De Boer, Denters & Goedegebuure 1998:153–164; Fulton, O 2002:187–121; Webster & Mosoetsa

2002; Moodie 2002:1–5). Drawing on this body of literature, we have considered three important dimensions in our analytical framework.

First, we hold that innovative change strategies are needed that account for the changing institutional environment (pressures from global competitiveness, budget constraints, transformation pressures, etc). As already pointed out, these strategies may certainly embrace dimensions of recent performativity discourses – some goal-setting, targets and indicators as well the necessary fiscal discipline. Such strategies must, however, be rooted in and reflect the unique nature of higher education institutions as primarily knowledge and learning organisations.

Second, the competing discourses of collegiality and managerialism, which have been the object of much debate, do not *per se* provide a suitable answer to the change management strategies required within the peculiarity of higher education institutions in South Africa. As analysts have claimed internationally, many South Africans would like to believe that 'collegiality' never existed in South Africa, or that, if the idea of collegiality has been considered, it has never been practiced. But what is collegiality? For Waters,

> The exercise of authority on the sole basis of **expertise** is the first and most important component of collegiality. A second theme that runs throughout analyses of collegiality is that of **equality** ... authority based on the technical competence of a 'company of equals'. Indeed equality is implied by expert authority ... . The third theme is **consensus**. All members of such organisations must participate in the decision-making process, and only decisions that have the full support of the entire collective 'carry the weight of moral authority' (Waters 1989:955).

The problem with Waters' account is that it confuses 'identity' or 'membership status' within the academy with equality. In our view, the academy is a very hierarchical structure, whose members share a high degree of common identity. Seen from Waters' angle, collegiality is certainly nothing but a myth that has never existed in practice. Put differently, collegiality in its idealised form remains unknown in South Africa. Thus, we would rather talk about collegiality as a highly contextual phenomenon which assumes varied forms and degrees of expression. As Kezar and Eckel have indicated, collegiality arises primarily from the disciplines of the faculty (Kezar & Eckel 2002). Collegiality values scholarly engagement, expertise, negotiation and consensus, collaborative leadership, shared governance and decision making, and rationality. However, contrary to Waters' view, collegiality operates within an unequal and essentially hierarchical structure whose members are brought together by their membership, identity and loyalty to the academy. It is our claim, with a great deal of evidence to back it up, that the foundations of this conception of collegiality were in theory and practice laid in the days of apartheid, as part of the heated intellectual contestation of the regime and its institutional entrenchment. This is an important legacy that needs to be recreated, nurtured and developed.

Managerialism is often embraced as an alternative to collegiality, which is seen as an archeological archetype too outdated and old-fashioned to deal with the pressures of the knowledge economy and global competitiveness. For the managerialists, the voice of command that has brought so much success to the capitalist production in industry is the answer. Managerialism focuses on the goals and purposes of the institution and as in industry it values efficiency, performance, effective supervisory skills and fiscal responsibility. As Jackson and Carter put it, 'The production of management knowledge is not informed by a sense of how work needs to be done and what resources are available to do it, nor by a sense of efficiency as a means to an end, but by the assumption that efficiency is an end in itself' (Jackson & Carter 1998 cited in Carpenter 2002:41).

It is our contention that managerialism might hinder the institution's ability to perform its core business – knowledge advancement through research and teaching – given its tight interventionist approach to management. Evidence collected by Johnson for her doctoral research seems to indicate that the increasing prevalence of managerial relationships is leading to the demise of collegiality, particularly at the faculty and school levels. In her view, the interplay between collegial discourses from below and managerial pressure from above has resulted in what she calls 'Contrived Collegial Managerialism' (Johnson 2004). Contrived Collegial Managerialism refers to a management model in which spontaneity, initiative, and voluntary interaction are constrained by management practices, regulations and controls that are geared at promoting efficiency and increasing individual and institutional performance.

As Du Toit has indicated, 'It is not clear how an executive deanship could be compatible with a "collegial" approach to the conduct of faculty governance in any serious sense' (du Toit 2001:6). Nonetheless, the corporate or managerial model has been implicitly and sometimes explicitly assumed to be desirable ('it would certainly give us a competitive edge'), inevitable ('we do not have much choice under the present economic circumstances') or necessary ('the only way we can get out of this financial mess'). This state of affairs is due to the complex pressures faced by higher education institutions. It seems fair to say that this process has been dominated by general scepticism about the effectiveness and benefits of the new deanship styles.

However, while collegiality is well equipped to modify practice and change structures because it builds on trust, in its classical form collegiality lacks the necessary dynamism to enable higher education institutions to cope with the pressures of an increasingly competitive environment and increasing economic constraints. This is aggravated by the fact that under apartheid the practice of collegiality was predominantly race and gender-based. Constellations of collegial practice were constituted in faculties and departments along racial or gender lines and at best along identity and social affinity. This will certainly require a great deal of reframing and re-conceptualisation of the current legacy of collegiality within the university.

How the tension between collegiality and managerialism has been resolved at

the faculty, school and departmental levels raises serious concerns. Aside from those exceptions where heads of schools and departmental chairs have taken on the task of filling the gap left by deans, academic and intellectual leadership is stumbling. No longer are deans seen to be participating in or presenting papers in faculty research seminars. No longer do deans convene meetings to debate major research or knowledge issues with the faculty, beyond the confines of institutional policy issues. The committee structure which previously drew on faculty to initiate and formulate policy proposals is being replaced by somewhat centralised structures, which comment on or provide feedback to policy brought down from above. We do not claim that there is a general spread of these practices. Substantiating such a claim would require a more systematic review of current practices within faculties. However, the fact that these practices are occurring with increasing frequency in different schools constitutes a matter of concern, and poses serious questions about current university management styles.

TOWARDS A NEW ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN: KEY DETERMINANTS

Worldwide, university restructuring and the rise of an executive style of university management have been triggered by different factors. The most common of these include: (i) the decline in state subsidisation of higher education, in both developing and developed countries, due to the global economic crisis; (ii) increasing pressure upon higher education institutions to demonstrate their relevance to society and, particularly, their ability to stimulate economic growth; (iii) increasing competition between institutions of higher education; and (iv) increasing pressure upon higher education institutions to become more managerially efficient and to demonstrate financial viability (Bertlesen 1998:130–158; Currie & Vidovich 1998; Harvey 2000:103–132; Marginson 1999; Shumar 1997). In South Africa, there have also been concerns connected to the much-needed transformation of apartheid universities. External influence by the state has played a significant role in determining the orientation of institutions in addressing the apartheid legacy.

The National Commission on Higher Education and subsequent Government White Paper have set out a policy framework outlining three specific features that should underpin the new system. These are: (i) increased participation; (ii) greater responsiveness; and (iii) increased cooperation and partnerships.[1] The principles of equity and redress, as well as the realities of demography, required an expansion of participation (ie student enrolments), feeder constituencies and programme offerings. Higher education institutions were asked to engage with the problems and challenges of the South African context and, through their governance structures, to provide for greater stakeholder consultation and participation in decision-making processes. Aspects of this context were to be reflected in the content, focus and delivery modes of higher education programmes, as well as in the institutional missions and policies. The tendency towards academic insularity and institutional self-reliance had to make way for recognition of the functional

interdependence between multiple actors and interests with a stake in higher education. Cooperative governance was proposed as the model that would facilitate coordination and steer relations between the state and higher education institutions. In addition, in line with government's macro-economic policy framework, GEAR (Growth, Expansion and Redistribution), efficiency had become a fourth major feature of national fiscal policy.

Against this background, members of the Wits University executive (Professors A Kemp and J Sinclair) together with some members of the Committee of University Principals (CUP), visited institutions in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Nigeria. Institutions visited included the Universities of Western Australia, Queensland and Canberra, and James Cook University. The team emphasised in its reports that these institutions were well ahead in introducing new institutional arrangements to address issues of access and economic survival in response to the declining state subsidy (Framework for Academic Restructuring 2000:3). The message conveyed was essentially, 'We are lagging behind, and we need to follow suit.' The apparent confidence and trust in university administration which was engendered by the appointment of Professor Colin Bundy as the new vice-chancellor of Wits precipitated the transformative process. Bundy brought together a management team – complete with members of the ruling party – which came to be regarded as legitimate leadership (Senior Manager, April 2003). According to Fitzgerald (2003:1–14), 'this new leadership was also familiar and comfortable with globally current ideas in designing more entrepreneurial higher education processes and possessed the intellectual confidence to proceed proactively into the future'.

Like many other institutions, the University of the Witwatersrand has attempted to respond to the challenges of a reform process – a process which impacts on every aspect of academic life, from student access and support to staff recruitment and retention issues (eg the Employment Equity Plan); from academic programme development to campus climate strategies. Wits has attempted to respond proactively to a changing environment and context through self-regulatory and pre-emptive measures, so as to safeguard its institutional autonomy. As a result, it has remained unaffected by major overhauling measures which were introduced by the Ministry of Education through the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the National Plan for Higher Education, particularly institutional mergers.

An important feature of the reform process has been the implementation of a new organisational design with profound implications for the management and operational procedures and processes of the university.

A NEW ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEANSHIP

There is an important body of literature that conceptualises institutional restructuring strategies and practices under capitalism by distinguishing between core and non-core business of an organisation (Thompson & McHugh 1995; Standing 1999; Van der Walt *et al* 2002). A common thread within this body of

literature is that during the period of late capitalism, corporate firms tend to focus upon their core business and outsource those functions which they consider to be peripheral. This pattern is widely referred to as Atkinson's model. While recent critiques have challenged the usefulness of this model, because even within the core one can make similar distinctions – which could lead to confusion – we suggest that, in its general terms, the model seems to have provided legitimacy to the protagonists of the restructuring process. Indeed, a 'mean and lean' institutional arrangement, focusing on core university business, was advocated to enhance institutional efficiency and cost-effectiveness. This new arrangement was to be achieved through downsizing and rightsizing.

The distinction between core and non-core business inspired the recommendations of the Support Service Review Team at Wits in 2001. The team emphasised the importance of high quality service standards; a client service orientation; the improvement of management practices, operational functions and information systems to overcome fragmentation and improve cross-functional integration; the improvement of support for academic processes; rationalisation of organisation structures; implementation of service partnerships; the development of a coherent strategy to support marketing; and alignment of support service restructuring with academic restructuring (Support Service Review Recommendations 1999:11–12). Apart from staff retrenchments, the process culminated in four general major developments: (i) the outsourcing of support services perceived as peripheral to the university's core functions; (ii) the reduction of the number of faculties; (iii) the establishment of new academic entities within schools in the form of schools, departments and clusters; and (iv) the establishment of new management priorities, including the appointment of executive deans. The table below shows the new institutional reconfiguration of the university:

University of the Witwatersrand

The New Academic Units

'Legacy' Faculties	New Faculties
1. Commerce 2. Law 3. Management	1. Commerce, Law and Management
4. Engineering 5. Architecture	2. Engineering and the Built Environment
6. Health Sciences	3. Health Sciences
7. Education 8. Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	4. Humanities
9. Science	5. Science

The new organisational design had important implications. The faculties, as major academic units, were reduced from nine to five, but became larger in size. This had profound implications for managerial operations. The deans had to review their management styles and mechanisms so as to deal with the larger units. Not infrequently, it has been suggested that the large sizes of the various faculties tend to overwhelm the deans, who are thus forced to privilege a managerial style in decision making, at the expense of academic leadership. Faculties, together with the remaining support services, were turned into 'responsibility centres' within a framework of decentralisation and devolution of authority and responsibilities. The creation of responsibility centres rested on several assumptions. First, responsibility centres would result in improved management practice, as management decisions taken by managers who are *closest* to the operational space are likely to have better impact. Second, the *speed* of decisions and their implementation would be enhanced by the elimination of unnecessary authorisation iterations. Third, the development of managers and leaders would be accelerated by increasing the *scope* of management delegation of responsibilities (Senior Academic and Manager, April 2003).

In this context, financial and business management positions were established which allowed for the devolution to the faculty level of operational functions, such as human resourcing, academic registration and research management. However, through replicating these functions five times across the various faculties, with additional support such as financial assistants being provided to each office, savings have not been attained throughout the institution. According to a member of the senior financial personnel, costs have actually escalated as a consequence of the restructuring. Specifically, the increased bureaucracy within the institution has proved expensive (Senior Financial Personnel, June 2003). Furthermore, by shifting responsibility for the management of resources to the lower levels of the organisation, the generation of new income has become the responsibility of various devolved units, since these need to find means of supplementing their incomes to cover their costs. The faculty committee system has been downscaled to streamline decision making: faculty boards have been reduced and major academic committees (such as the undergraduate, postgraduate and research committees, with occasional *ad hoc* committees) have been established.

The broad concern was centred on attaining efficiency, as an institutional response to dealing with the financial crisis. Efficiency was to be achieved through new organisational arrangements, technologies and management mechanisms (Massey 2001:237–263; Williams 2001:49–73). In line with Clarke and Newman, we argue that the process of rationalisation and institutional reconfiguration – within the framework of neo-liberal, macro-economic discourse – has precipitated the adoption of managerial technologies (Clarke & Newman 1997).

NEW MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EXECUTIVE DEANSHIP

Deans are typically third-in-command after the vice-chancellor and the deputy vice-chancellors. They are responsible for core business functions. They occupy positions that lead to the vice-chancellor position and to other senior operating roles. Although national and institutional micro-politics do play a role, deanship thus provides one of the primary succession routes to the top executive positions (vice-chancellor, deputy vice-chancellor) in higher education institutions. The success of a dean depends on a number of attributes, though the requirements vary across institutional contexts. Such attributes include confidence (internal security that bolsters one's capacity to ward off doubts and maintain a strong self-concept); competence (solid grounding in one or more areas of required expertise, and mastery of broader skills); credibility (reputation for successful performance, integrity and impact in the core academic and management functions); leadership (power to influence decision making); effectiveness (getting the job done); and efficiency (getting the job done with fewer personal and institutional costs) (Wolterson *et al* 2002).

Three key changes were introduced concerning the structure and operation of deanship: (i) the establishment of 'executive deanship' (though some deans still prefer to refer to themselves simply as deans); (ii) the abolition of the rotational model, and its substitution with formal appointments that follow normal recruitment procedures, such as the use of a search committee, advertisements and a selection process; and (iii) the extension of the period of service to five years, with management training as an ongoing requirement. These policy changes are consistent with international trends.

The newly-appointed executive deans received the following responsibilities:

- Adopting a *faculty mission statement* and developing and implementing a *faculty strategy plan*;
- Developing and implementing an *academic plan* for the faculty;
- Preparing and implementing a *financial plan* for the faculty;
- Formulating and implementing a *teaching and learning policy*;
- Formulating and implementing a broad f*aculty policy for research and research training*;
- Co-ordinating and *strategically aligning the activities* of the faculty's constituent schools;
- Administering, on the central database, the *registration and academic records* of students registered for degrees and diplomas awarded by the faculty;
- Administering and managing a two-line (recurrent and non-recurrent) budget allocated by the SEG (Senior Executive Group) in accordance with *financial norms and policies*;
- Promoting and co-ordinating *multi-disciplinary teaching and research* programmes, both within the faculty and between faculties;

- Promoting and developing *marketing, income-generation and fund-raising activities* to contribute to the sustainability of the faculty and its component schools;
- Managing *recruitment, appointment, promotion and equity issues* within renewed policies and procedures.
- *Delegating* functions, as necessary and appropriate (Functions, Responsibilities and Competencies of Deans 2001:1–2).

Most of these responsibilities fit well within the parameters of the role of executive dean. An executive dean is the chief executive officer of a faculty, and is responsible for the strategic planning and development of that faculty. Executive deanship encompasses tasks in all key domains: planning and management, academic life, financial matters, personnel, and physical resources or infrastructure. The above list of responsibilities, plus our own informed judgement based on our observations, suggests that it would be appropriate to strengthen the business and administrative dimensions of the faculty. Appropriate, too, would be the strengthening of a strategic approach to management, planning, fiscal controls and mechanisms, as well as the privileging of performativity as a tool of academic management.[2]

However, of critical importance in our discussion is the lack of clarity about the *general leadership* role of the executive dean within a faculty. When leadership is not emphasised, problems are more likely to result, with profound institutional implications. As Gmelch (1994) indicates, under weak leadership faculties and the institution cannot have adequate representation; faculties lack a strong voice of advocacy; institutions suffer from a lack of connection and communication; and 'the profession suffers from the void that is at best temporarily created'. We have noted with interest that several international advertisements for the post of executive deans state unequivocally that the primary function of the Executive Dean of a Faculty is to provide leadership and direction, and to serve as the official representative of the Faculty. This is a crucial matter, which, in our view, cannot be left to the discretion of each personality on the job.

Apart from the silence regarding leadership, the stipulated functions are consistent with international trends and managerial practices. As has already been pointed out, how deans meet the challenges posed by these responsibilities – that is, how they do the work, build relationships, forge a vision and still 'have a life', is highly contextual matter. The measure of success in this regard is tied in with the particular context of an individual institution. As Riebe-Estrella (2001:4–5) puts it, 'there are no deans-in-the-abstract' or deans in general, but only deans within concrete contexts.

First, how each dean plays out his or her role is directly dependent on *personality*, including one's talents and dreams, professional profile and personal and academic life trajectory – in other words, one's biography and background. These could be either an asset or a liability. Deanship has attracted scholars from a

variety of disciplines, who bring contrasting conceptualisations of deanship and academic leadership. One can distinguish here between the 'opportunists' and the 'visionaries', depending on how they locate deanship within their professional and personal life trajectories. For the opportunists, deanship is a hiatus, a sort of 'time out' in their career trajectories – which point in some other direction and have other goals. Deanship may even be a stepping stone towards a senior post in a completely different career path, a sort of 'spicing up' of one's curriculum vitae. For the visionaries, deanship is a calling, part of one's commitment to institutional development. It is not for power or gain. This explains why, according to international surveys, most dean appointees tend to be internally hired.

Second, meeting the challenges of deanship depends on the *institution* concerned: its history and culture, its own peculiar ethos, a particular constellation of internal relationships, and a specific connection to a concrete social location. Deans operate with reference to the particular coordinates of their institutions and academic units. An understanding of the history and the culture of the institution frequently suggests how to identify sources of leverage that can help surmount obstacles to advancement. Third, deanship depends on the social environment or the people within the institution, who are usually referred to as *stakeholders* (faculty, support staff, students, etc). They are the most important factor that determines the success or failure of a dean, the 'resources' or 'stumbling blocks' (Gary Riebe-Estrella 2001:3).

MANAGING INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL: POSITIONAL AMBIGUITY AND ROLE CONFLICT

Executive deans find themselves at the intersection of conflicting interests (Harman 2002) academics, business, administration and leadership. Their position places them in between students, faculty, administration, and external stakeholders. They are expected to defend the interests of all of these parties, or to challenge, or simply to mediate, depending on their own positioning regarding the institutional mission and purposes. This complex and contradictory positioning is referred to as role conflict (Wolverton 1999:80). Role conflict or ambiguity relates to the degree to which people have sufficient information to perform the tasks expected of them, or to ambiguous and problematic work requirements and performance expectations, plus tensions within personal value systems (Ibid:2).

Berling (2000:1&3) refers to deans as 'boundary' persons, who work at the boundaries between various groups to enable the institution to fulfil its purposes.[3] According to her, 'each of these constituencies tends to see the Dean as responsible primarily to them'; and 'each can resent it when it is the role of the Dean to represent the perspectives, concerns, or interests of one of these groups to another' (Ibid:1). A dean's role is described by Breslin as resembling 'the inside of a sandwich', pressed between the needs of inherently conflicting bodies (cited in Mullen 2002). The nature of deans' work requires changing from academic scholar

(faculty or academic staff) and leader to executive manager/administrator, fundraiser and developer.

As head of the faculty, it is the dean's role to develop and nurture faculty leadership, but also to keep the faculty appropriately in touch with student concerns as well as the concerns of the board, senior university management and external stakeholders. At the administrative level, there are important long-term responsibilities for fiscal management, care of the physical infrastructure, technology upgrades, library, and student residence life and so on. The multifaceted nature of these tasks points to a job that requires a solid academic background for intellectual leadership, sound business and administrative logic, and confident interpersonal skills so as to achieve the complex operational and strategic goals of a major academic unit. In these relations, the dean may experience role ambiguity, where uncertainty is experienced regarding discrepancies between one's performance expectations and work requirements (Wolverton 1999:80).

In interpersonal terms, there are five main areas to deanship: (i) the relationship with the faculty; (ii) the relationship with students; (iii) the relationship with other deans; (iv) the relationship with the Senior Executive Team (SET); and (v) the relationship with the support staff. In this article we concern ourselves with the first four. The priorities and decisions in this regard should take into account a range of considerations: internal institutional arrangements; the opportunities for the students; and the desires and aspirations of the faculty and the needs of the wider society, which are not necessarily the same as marketplace considerations (Tucker & Bryan 1988:6). We reiterate in this section the powerful contention made by Du Toit, that universities in the post-apartheid South Africa should not be concerned only with possible *external threats* from state intervention, 'but should be as much concerned with *internal threats and defects* in the quality of intellectual life within the university community itself' (Du Toit 2001:3). If this internal threat is not taken into consideration, instead of executive deans becoming 'dragons' who can drive away both internal and external forces that threaten the academy and act as the most important custodians of the core values of the academy, they will instead turn out to be dragons who undermine sound academic and scholarly life. Our claims are based on the assumption that notwithstanding the multifaceted nature of deans tasks, their role is fundamentally about managing intellectual capital.

DEALING WITH THE FACULTY: ESTABLISHING 'DIALOGUES OF RESPECT'

At the faculty level, the challenge is to build a community within the faculty, bringing people together in their common purpose and supporting their individual development. Faculty practice at Wits is underpinned by different academic subcultures, which emphasise different dimensions of university life, not always in harmony with the institutional strategic goals. Some have been attracted to Wits' research tradition and have joined the university on that basis. Some love to teach, and they are still to realise their research potential. Others have strong bonds with

the community, built throughout the years of struggle against apartheid, and see extension or outreach as their strength, and so forth. In this regard, the deans face the challenge of reconciling the diversity embedded in the values and directions of their faculty members with the strategic and managerial goals of the institution. A strong leadership would certainly opt for what Tierney calls 'dialogues of respect', within and across 'communities of difference', (Mullen 2002:3) which will not be possible within the narrow parameters of managerialism.

The abolition of apartheid has created new opportunities for higher education institutions, particularly at the level of human resources development. Young and wonderfully dedicated people, with a rich store of abilities and potential – and tales of professional accomplishment and acumen – are joining established faculties. There are, however, serious challenges. The new faculty mix very often seems to lack the sustaining connectivity for such people to re-imagine their possibilities and potentials and release their energies. This challenge is aggravated by the fact that established faculty is aging, and its members are joining the retirement pool in large numbers, without leaving a dynamic mechanism for leveraging the creation of the new professoriate. We argue in this article that these challenges call for more aggressiveness from the deans at the level of intellectual and academic leadership rather than at the level of day-to-day managerial and economic dimensions of faculty life.

Rather than moving reactively towards an imminent crisis, we suggest a proactive strategy facilitated by the deans to tackle three priority areas facing academic units within the university. The three priorities are: (i) issues of *identity* to bring about synergy, integration and shared vision within the academic units; (ii) issues of *regeneration* around strategic hiring and retention of faculty; and (iii) issues of *formation* throughout the institution and across programmes, so as to secure the establishment of a dynamic professoriate which will replace the aging population (Hogan 2001:4–5).

Concerns with the identity issue are well reflected in the university's staff development policy, which states that 'Neither the maintenance of current performance nor the achievement of significant change will be possible without staff who are both committed to the University's objectives and in possession of the necessary skills to achieve them' (Wits Staff Development Policy 2003). This policy statement goes further, emphasising that 'through continuous personal and professional development, members of the staff will be enabled to understand and subscribe to the University's mission and values that support the institution's development objectives, and its culture, ethos and policies'. The question of university regeneration, or preparation of the next generation, assumes particular significance at Wits, which is populated increasingly by aging faculty members, and which has a major equity challenge among staff in terms of gender and race (Du Toit 2001:7). According to the Wits Employment Equity Office, in 2002 73,7% of full professors at Wits were white males and only 0,6% was black (African) women. No Indian and Coloured staff were represented at this level.

In his work 'The spirits of our teachers live in our souls', Bob Smith (who

found his way to the position of provost at the University of Arkansas, in addition to publishing two books on research management (Smith 2003)), places mentoring by many supervisors, particularly deans, at the centre of his success. Related to the mentorship function is the need to move beyond a simple liaison to being custodian of core academic and scholarly values, and an advocate for the faculty at the senior management level. There is an increasing scepticism about whether, in the long run, any strategy will bear fruits if 'an executive efficiently manages an increasingly apathetic faculty' (Du Toit 2001:6) but collegiality is at risk or is eroded from academic circles.

DEALING WITH THE HEADS OF SCHOOLS AND DEPARTMENTAL DIRECTORS: NURTURING A CULTURE OF EXECUTIVISM?

A head of school once said that given the number of schools that a dean has to deal with and the amount and diversity of issues entailed, a managerial relationship with the heads of schools appears inevitable. There is little time to address intellectual and scholarly issues in a collegial manner. The danger is that a particular form of socialisation in management practice is developing at the faculty executive level, which seems to be filtering down into school and departmental structures as well – with detrimental effects on collegiality. Instead of being academic leaders, heads of schools are increasingly becoming agents of a managerial culture in their schools. We are faced with the phenomenon of 'executivism' in schools, the only repositories of collegiality. This phenomenon is evident wherever heads of schools tend to see executive deanship in its various nuances as a suitable management model for efficient faculty management.

   While heads of schools are expected to be – and view themselves as – primarily academics, they are increasingly drawn into the fold of managerialism, and face concerns about managing schools and the faculty efficiently. In their schools, these pressures often translate into an emphasis on upward accountability through line management reporting. Other manifestations are the taking on of control and liaison roles at the expense of leadership; the implementation of workload models based on cost-effectiveness and efficiency – at the expense of quality; and an emphasis on outcomes, with little attention being paid to process issues and the human factors entailed. For these reasons, the management responsibilities of heads of schools tend to overshadow their academic leadership roles (Interviews with Heads of School April to October 2003).

DEALING WITH THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE TEAM: DEVOLUTION OR (DE)CONCENTRATION OF AUTHORITY?

There are at least four main areas of operational relationships requiring a high degree of interaction and cooperation between the dean and the vice-chancellor: (i) ceremonial activities at the central or faculty level (eg graduation ceremonies,

convocations, opening of major events); (ii) fund-raising activities; (iii) the senior executive team (elsewhere referred to as administrative council); and (iv) Senate. In ceremonial activities, besides giving the usual handshake, the deans and the vice-chancellor exchange turns in making introductory remarks, opening and closing speeches. Tucker and Bryan suggest that there are times where some ceremonial relationships go beyond what appears to be mere ceremony, and become instrumental relationships. There are times, they argue, when the presence of the vice-chancellor is necessary to the dean's plan to effect radical reform or to introduce major innovation (the opening or closure of an academic department, introduction of new standards of performance, etc) (Tucker & Bryan 1988:115). This necessity became almost a standard pattern when the then vice-chancellor, Prof C Bundy, visited faculties as a prelude to the process of faculty restructuring. In fund-raising, too, a healthy relationship between the vice-chancellor and the dean can be mutually beneficial. The vice-chancellor's endorsement and advocacy is essential for closing deals at the faculty level. In a similar vein, the dean may be needed to assist the vice-chancellor in the pursuit of major funding opportunities for the institution.

The Senior Executive Team was constituted at Wits as an informal arrangement to advise the vice-chancellor on matters concerning his or her office. It is distinct in its composition, and functions via the vice-chancellor's executive staff. It is made up of the vice-chancellor, the deputy vice-chancellors, the university registrar and central administrators, and all the deans. For the deans to be effective at this level, they need to demonstrate attributes such as leadership, cooperation, the ability to play on the same team, tough mindedness, and generosity (ibid). An appropriate balance of these attributes is the key to a dean's success.

Keller points to four possible scenarios in the relationship between vice-chancellor and dean. The first is a *genuine partnership or complementarity*, a relationship based on common vision and the mutual intermeshing of roles. The vice-chancellor assumes his or her overall authority as the chief executive officer of the institution, and reserves the role of the chief executive officer of an academic unit to the dean. Both share a common vision, close collaboration and trust. The dean enjoys a genuine relationship of working with, not under, the institution's chief executive officer. The second scenario is one of *weakness*, when the vice-chancellor does not exercise her or his due authority, is too weak, avoids making decisions, and leaves things dangling within the institution. The third scenario is one in which the vice-chancellor assumes a *totalitarian role* and always claims primary role as chief academic as well as chief executive officer, making the role of the deans redundant. The forth scenario is one of a *healthy tension* and respect between the dean and the vice-chancellor, even if the relationship cannot be an ideal and collaborative partnership (Keller 2001:4–5). This relationship is particularly beneficial when competing interests are being advocated in relation to the institution. While flexibility is essential for a healthy relationship, this does not mean adjusting at all costs, particularly when the dilemma between being a

leader and liaising needs to be reconciled. This dilemma was well illustrated by one of the deans:

> ... deans would be the 'piggies in the middle'. Faculties would think ... that deans are working in cahoots with the senior executive and the senior executive would think that the deans are just there on the other side. Ja, you do have to and you've got to do it in different ways at different times. Sometimes you are on the side of your faculty and other times you've got to convince your faculty that they've got to do something for the good of the institution (Interview with Dean, January 2003).

While Keller's scenario typology does provide some insights into the relationship between the dean and the vice-chancellor at a personal level, it does not account for the mediatory role played by upper management structures, particularly the Senior Executive Team (SET) and the Human Resources Committee (HRC). The Human Resources Committee was established in 2001 to replace the Academic Staffing and Promotions Committee, which was devolved to faculty level. While the Faculty Staffing and Promotions Committee deals with staff appointments and promotions, the Human Resources Committee, which represents both Council and Senate, considers policy, procedures and conditions of employment for staff (Interview with Senior Manager, February 2004). We contend that the participation of deans in these particular structures has played an instrumental role in shaping a particular pattern of executive deanship, characterised by particular relationships with the faculty and other major university bodies such as Senate.

The lack of clarity about their decision-making functions might have created among the deans new perceptions about their role, and new expectations about their authority – perceptions which then underpin their current management practices. This is not to deny the agency role played by individual deans in this process. Ideally, the dean must be an advocate for his or her academic unit, yet be an advocate for the welfare of the whole institution. However, there is an increasing realisation that SET was becoming a prime power structure, where major decisions where formally or informally taken, and where the voice and authority of the deans was elevated above important decision-making bodies such as the faculty boards and Senate. This trend resulted in a sense of alienation and loss of meaning about the role of ordinary faculty in Senate debates.

It appears that the restructuring process has not genuinely resulted in devolution of power and authority to individual faculties, but in de-concentration of the power and authority of the vice-chancellor through the integration of the executive deans into the Senior Executive Team. In other words, the power and authority of the vice-chancellor has been diffused but not relinquished through delegation of management functions to the executive deans. In addition, this process was accompanied by a phenomenon that we refer to as 'the de-DVCization of the

faculty', ie the transfer of the traditional authority and influence that the deputy vice-chancellors had over the faculty to the executive deans.

DEALING WITH OTHER DEANS: COMPETITION VERSUS COLLABORATION

Given the nature of the dean's work, each dean will find it necessary to relate to other deans in a variety of relationships, be they cooperative, competitive, or neutral. While their profiles favour the prevalence of managerialism within executive deanship, we cannot argue with certainty that the five Wits deans all have similar approaches to university management, particularly given the different and conflicting subcultures that once underpinned academic practice in the 'legacy' faculties (see Table above). A degree of convergence has been facilitated by the deans' participation in SET and the fact that three of them were involved in previous institutional strategic planning at Wits; also, one of the five deans has been trained in business management (this person holds an MBA degree) (Currie & Vidovich 1998; Fulton 2002:187–212). However, tensions have been determined by structural considerations regarding the process and outcome of faculty restructuring.

The most contentious issue in the interfaculty relationships is centred on the distinction between 'deficit' and 'surplus' faculties – a distinction drawn according to whether faculties operate with a deficit or surplus in their expenditures. Currently, the two faculties identified as deficit faculties are those of Engineering and the Built Environment; and of Humanities, Social Science and Education; while the three surplus faculties are Commerce, Law and Management; Health Sciences; and Science. These distinctions are informed by the Attributable Income and Expenditure resource allocation model to be introduced at Wits from 2004 over a three-year period. This model allows for decisions about the income and expenditure of each academic unit to be made with increasingly less intervention and financial support from the central administration. While the decentralisation of financial responsibilities places income generation and fiscal responsibility for effective and efficient use of resources on the dean's desk, success in this endeavour is threatened by the cross-subsidisation policy of the university. This policy requires that part of the surplus from the non-deficit faculties or schools be used to subsidise the deficit ones. This situation drives the faculties to situations confounded by ambiguity and conflict. A interview with a dean in the course of this study was revealing:

> They're frightened because they're going to be exposed in public as being a *deficit unit*, deficit faculty and I think that they see that as a *mark of shame* or something, you know, I just don't understand that. ... But we are wasting time. They're giving very philosophical arguments as to why they need this, that and the other and, I am sorry, I'm very crude about it ... . I say, 'I'm not going to engage in any sort of philosophical debate because the bottom line is: if you do something and you get

support from the university to do it, it's my people that suffer'. (Interview with Dean 4, 3 May 2002 and February 2003.)

The Senior Executive Team has certainly played a critical role in moderating these tensions. Interfaculty competition should not compromise the leadership role of the executive deans. A great deal of collaboration and interaction among deans, within or across institutions, could be beneficial. It is common practise to establish networks of deans with the primary purpose of advocacy and professional learning, and which emphasise research issues and information sharing. The Spencer Foundation-sponsored RTG (Research Training Grant) annual retreat is a good international example. Deans of education from the top American Schools of Education get together and review practice and leadership in research and postgraduate training in their faculties, as well as advocacy strategies in their relationships with government and other institutions. Currently, efforts are being made to establish the AAU (Association of American Universities) Education Deans' Group. What is most noteworthy about these networks is that they work across institutions but within specific faculties, and therefore illustrate the continuing tension between faculty-specific collaborations and tensions between faculties.

DEALING WITH STUDENTS: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Two important considerations underpin the relationship between deans and students. First, students are the prime reason for the existence of the academic programmes offered within a faculty. Second, as Tucker and Bryan have indicated, students always become alumni; the better the students are treated by the institution, the better they will treat the institution when they become alumni (Tucker & Bryan 1988:110).

Given these reasons, we would expect deans to pay particular attention to or be directly involved in issues concerning student welfare; however, the relationship between students and deans generally remains a distant one. We are aware of institutions in South Africa where students are not allowed to contact their deans. Several factors contribute to this situation. Universities not only have a line management function catering for student needs (eg dean of students), but in many cases they also make provision for student government. The latter allows for student representation within key university governance structures. Tucker and Bryan have the following to say:

> The presence of an active, energetic Office of Student Affairs with institution wide responsibilities, coupled with a well functioning student personnel officer in each of the academic units within the institution, lead generally to only one conclusion: deans will see only the best and the worst students in programs under their

supervision unless they make a conscious effort to become involved in at least a few aspects of student life (Ibid:102).

Recent developments at the University of the Witwatersrand tend, however, to place more responsibility on the deans regarding student issues, particularly those concerning postgraduate students. The University's Strategic Plan, *Shaping the Future* (1999), has identified the development of postgraduate studies as a major priority in line with Wits' commitment to becoming the premier site for research and postgraduate scholarship in Africa. For this purpose, Senate approved the establishment of several enabling structures at all levels of university management. These include a postgraduate office; the university Graduate Studies Committee (GSC); the appointment of an Assistant Dean, Postgraduate (at the faculty level); and the appointment of a Postgraduate Coordinator (within each school of the faculty). The postgraduate office is a 'one-stop', friendly facility where new or prospective postgraduate students can obtain information. It provides advice; processes applications; facilitates student orientation, induction and programme familiarisation in coordination with the relevant faculties or schools; and monitors the appointment of examiners.

Chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, the GSC oversees all research and postgraduate training in the university, and comprises representatives from each of the five faculties plus the Dean of Students, the Head of Postgraduate Office, two members elected by Senate, and two postgraduate students nominated by the Postgraduate Students' Association. At the faculty level, the Assistant Dean of Postgraduate Studies chairs a committee of postgraduate coordinators from each of the schools of the faculty (Report of the Postgraduate Task Team 2002). While the executive deans are not directly involved in these structures, they certainly remain key drivers. Through their leadership they ensure that enrichment, academic support and professional skills development are provided to postgraduate students throughout their period of study.

While the institution has seen a range of efforts to facilitate its orientation to postgraduate students and studies, restructuring of Wits has changed the relationship between academic staff and students – and particularly between deans and students. The re-orientation of the institution invites students to perceive themselves as customers, clients and essentially recipients of a knowledge service. The enhancement of services is not merely aimed at improving the students' environment within the institution, but also at warding off potential competition for students from other institutions. In this regard, deans play a central role in securing adequate student numbers within their faculties.

CONCLUSION

First, research indicates that very little knowledge and understanding has been developed about the appropriateness of executive deanship modelled on business

practices. Second, while management skills and experience are increasingly being considered, higher education institutions still place more emphasis on the academic and scholarly records of candidates for deanship. As a result, there is a mismatch between the academic, collegial and scholarly background of deans and the emerging business mode of management which they have to practise. In terms of management skills, the new deans need more than they bring to the job. This is evident at various levels, whether in regard to leadership skills, administrative experience, understanding of role conflict and ambiguity, or awareness of the cost to individual scholarship or knowledge of changes in personal career paths and experience, and the consequent trade-offs. Deans must deal with the uncertainty of learning by doing and by experimentation, which has serious implications for healthy academic life. The University of the Witwatersrand is no exception in this regard, and the tensions emanating from this situation are beginning to rear their ugly heads.

A number of patterns seem to have emerged. First, this article points to an increasing concentration of power and authority within the Senior Executive Team. This situation has turned executive deans into 'super deans' with maximum administrative authority over faculty, at the expense of a healthy collaborative and collegial leadership among faculty. The symptoms have been felt not only within the faculty but also in other major academic structures, such as faculty boards and Senate. Second, the encroachment of managerialism has become more visible within schools and departments. This trend is a response to management socialisation at the faculty and school executive levels, and to the reporting overload as performance and upward accountability pressures become more visible. We have called this phenomenon the 'entrenchment of executivism' in schools and departments.

Third, there is little evidence to indicate that the much-needed efficiency and effectiveness is reaching fruition. The costs engendered by the increase in professional bureaucracies (that is, overlay of management structures) are having a negative effect on shrinking resources. The time needed by faculty to focus on the institutional core business is being absorbed by increasing management pressures. The research output either remains stagnant, or is dwindling, and the student throughput has become a matter of major concern. To survive, the university will certainly have to deal with the question of increasing faculty apathy, and this will require a review of current managerial practices. The champions, agents and collaborators who are needed can hardly emerge within a command-driven and tightly coupled university system.

Finally, much attention has been given to organisational design issues. This concern is legitimate in the sense that the changing institutional environment demands new governance strategies, which should rest on particular organisational structures. However, issues of governance relate not only to structure but also to people. There is more to organisations than formal structures. As Masland has noted, 'the classic elements of organisational design such as hierarchical structure,

formalisation, rationality, and specialisation are important ... but they do not fully explain organisational behaviour'.[4] Organisational design depends to a large extent on organisational culture, which in turn depends on the people within and around it. Within higher learning institutions we are talking about particular kinds of people, vested within certain attributes (expertise) and privileges (autonomy and academic freedom) by virtue of the nature of their work: knowledge advancement.

History has demonstrated with a great deal of evidence that in universities, decisions are made and implemented effectively through informal interaction among a group of peers, and through collective action of the faculty as a whole, where formal hierarchy plays little part.[5] An organisation is healthy or not healthy to the degree that the people in the system believe it is a responsive institution. When no effective intellectual and academic leadership exists, people tend to feel powerless about the overlays of structure, for they cannot identify where decisions are made and cannot clearly determine their own role in the institution. In this sense, change is not just a matter of *structural conditioning*, but a process of *educational interaction* and *negotiation* among interest groups.

ENDNOTES

1   For further details see Ann Harper and Michael Cross, *Campus diversity audit* (Pretoria: CHET 1999:10–11), and NCHE, *A framework for transformation* (Pretoria: Department of Education 1996).
2   The introduction of performance appraisals for staff tied to salary increases has been a matter of fierce contestation.
3   Judith Berling, Boundaries and the Chief Academic Officer, Presentations at the 2000 Deans Conference on the theme 'Boundaries, roles and burdens of the Chief Academic Officer', p 1 & 3.
4   Masland, Andrew T. 'Organisational culture in the study of higher education', in Petersen, Marvin W. (ed), op cit:70.
5   Clark, Burton R. 'Faculty organisation and authority', in Petersen, Marvin W. (ed), op cit:267.

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