Trouble at Mill: quality of academic worklife issues within a comprehensive Australian university

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ABSTRACT   *This study describes the quality of academic worklife (QAWL) within a comprehensive university in Australia. Academics responded to the Academic Work Environment Survey, a diagnostic instrument designed to assess the relationships between and among academics' demographic characteristics (age, gender, position, discipline area), work environment perceptions (role, job, supervisor, structure, sector characteristics), and work attitudes (self-estrangement, organisational commitment). Findings revealed positive QAWL features such as role clarity, motivating job characteristics, and low levels of self-estrangement (alienation). Negative QAWL features included role overload, low levels of job feedback, and limited opportunities to influence university decision-making. Comments indicated that many academics feel disenchanted and demoralised with the tenets and practices of managerialism. The study concludes that comprehensive universities suffer from strategic dissonance. They want to deliver cost efficiencies and maintain institutional reputation (i.e. centralise), but also want to serve distinct market sectors and expand their revenue base (i.e. decentralise).*

> Once again the commercial approach to university management totally ignores pedagogy, and undermines the whole concept of the university as a seat of learning. Further such approaches actually endanger the development of smart minds and forces a mill-like approach to education. Such changes have affected the overall quality of life of academics. (Lecturer/Business, Chevron university)

Introduction

Faced with increasing student numbers, decreasing government funding per student and an active higher education sector union, senior university managers across the Australian Unified National System have adopted strong forms of corporate principles and practices. Recently, corporate management practices in Australian universities have been strengthened by a Conservative Liberal government 'hamstrung by continuing workplace rigidities and by the persistence of a tertiary union-dictated pattern bargaining agenda' (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) 1999, p. 5). Marginson (1999, p. 7), examining the institutional governance of 17 of the 36 doctoral universities in Australia after a decade of corporate reform, reports that:

> University purpose and operations is now defined by strong forms of executive control, in which leader-managers take the role of strategic planners and re-

engineers, guided by corporate-style institutional missions. Institutional reform emphasises flexibility in resource deployment, personnel and mission. Increasingly decisions are controlled not by legislative-style meetings but by plans, targets and formulae subject to executive control. The nature and extent of these moves varies by university.

Corporate reform of Australian universities has its roots in the Commonwealth Ministry of John Dawkins (1987–92). As Labour Government Minister of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), Dawkins initiated a comprehensive reform process that transformed the higher education sector from an elitist (binary) system to a mass (unitary) system. Between 1988 and 1994, 19 universities and 44 colleges became 36 universities through an extended process of amalgamation (Aitkin, 1997, p. 46). The abolition of the so-called binary system, which distinguished between universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs—polytechnic equivalents) with respect to roles and funding, meant that all institutions were designated comprehensive, doctoral universities, offering teaching and research programmes across a full range of discipline areas. Committed to equity of access to higher education, Dawkins in 1987 published a Green Paper detailing proposed policies which signalled a 'significant expansion of higher education' (Dawkins, 1987, p. 12). A White Paper soon followed in July 1988, detailing the Commonwealth Government's long-term strategy for higher education (Dawkins, 1988). The Dawkins reforms of 1987/88 also announced the Government's intention to exercise greater control over the tertiary education sector through budgetary devolution and quality control mechanisms. The 1987/88 reforms included:

- a setting of minimum enrolment levels for institutions, both to enter the new system and to be eligible for certain types of funding;
- a major consolidation of institutions through amalgamation;
- a return to a system where individuals and the private sector shared some of the cost of their tuition; and
- a strengthening of management of universities and colleges which included the introduction of external quality control mechanisms (Aitkin, 1997; Meek, 1991).

The reform process occurred in the context of economic rationalism (Orchard, 1998, p. 21) and a growing government disenchantment with the capabilities of bureaucratic public services to deliver cost-effective services to consumers (Hughes, 1998, pp. 58–59). Successive Australian governments have accelerated the process of public sector reform in higher education, in an effort to improve the sector's productivity while holding budget resource allocation in check. The Conservative Coalition (1996–) Government of Prime Minister John Howard has steadily pushed universities towards a self-funding model (40% self-funding is the current benchmark). Government pressures to commercialise university operations has had a substantial effect on university culture, to the extent that university managers exalt entrepreneurial (profit-making) initiatives at the expense of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Marginson, 1999, pp. 9–10). Thus, institutional role confusion (i.e. operating in a more regulated environment whilst attempting to be more entrepreneurial) has increased since 1993 to the dismay of many academics (e.g. Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Taylor *et al.*, 1998).

Building on the findings of previous studies (e.g. McInnis *et al.*, 1994; McInnis, 1996; Lacy & Sheehan, 1997; Taylor *et al.*, 1998), this article presents some perceptions of the quality of academic worklife within one large multi-campus university in Australia. Academic staff members were surveyed during 1997, a period of increasing demands to modernise

higher education by successive Labour (1983–96) and Conservative (1996–) Common-wealth governments. As a background to the study, the authors comment on the rise of managerialism in academe. A conceptual framework for the study is then provided.

Managerialism in Academe

Managerialism, a public sector reform strategy based on strong forms of executive control and 'universal' management practices, dominates the dynamics of organisational change in Australian higher education (Clarke, 1998; Crowley, 1998, 1999; Debats & Ward, 1998; Ellingsen, 1999; Marginson, 1999). According to Pollitt's (1993) analysis of the develop-ment of management thought, managerialism as an ideology rests on three fundamental assumptions:

* institutional competition and consumer preferences are more efficient resource allocation mechanisms than government interventions and regulatory frameworks;
* explicit standards and measures of performance focused on outcomes (not inputs) are appropriate for all types of organisations (i.e. the universal management principle); and
* senior management can solve almost any problem it faces if it adopts strong executive leadership principles and private sector business techniques.

A key feature of the managerial paradigm in academe is an ethos based on executive control and the primacy of the market (see Randle & Brady, 1997, p. 232). As universities inculcate a market orientation (see Buchbinder, 1993), education objectives are formulated into strategic planning statements as ways of producing knowledge as a marketable, saleable commodity to different client (student) groups. Institutions then adopt aggressive promo-tional strategies to position themselves in the mainstream, and to differentiate themselves from each other. To maximise student throughput and income generation, lecturers are deployed as flexible facilitators and assessors. The quality of educational outcomes is assessed periodically by supervisors and external performance indicators. Indispensable to market responsiveness and income generation is a strong hierarchy of authority (to monitor and coordinate the work of academics), and managers skilled in business techniques such as strategic planning, budgeting and quality assurance (to achieve efficient and effective out-comes). To encourage a market orientation, senior managers promote business values with business-speak. Professors 'are now what vice-chancellors refer to as "middle managers" in a large corporate enterprise, with responsibility for administering teaching, research and employment conditions of academic staff' (Clarke, 1998, p. 55). The language of 'middle managers', 'customers' and 'products' has displaced the academic language of deans, students and courses.

  As in the UK (see Parker & Jary, 1995; Willmott, 1995; Randle & Brady, 1997), managerialism has produced forms of university work organisation that increase the power of management and diminish the autonomy of professional academics. To exert executive control, senior university management has removed many formal decision-making proce-dures and transferred power from committees to office-holders. Marginson (1999, p. 10), documenting the decline of collegial governance in Australian universities, reports that:

> The most important decision-making bodies are now the executive meetings of senior leaders, which sustain the vice chancellorship, dictate the formal agenda, often enjoy a high level of financial discretion, and play a key role in the daily running of universities.

Increased university centralisation is not a recent phenomenon. The results of the Carnegie

1991–1993 International Survey of the Academic Profession across 12 countries, including Australia, revealed a generalised lack of trust in academic administrators and a feeling that the academic profession was losing its autonomy (Boyer *et al.*, 1994; Lewis & Altbach, 1996). Throughout Asia, Latin America, Europe, the USA and Australia, academics said they were 'not at all influential' in helping to shape key academic policies at the institutional level' (Boyer *et al.*, 1994, p. 15).

The extent to which managerialism has impacted positively or negatively on academic work activities is not clear. In Australia, individual academics report dumbing-down in Australian universities (Clarke, 1998; Crowley, 1998), academic megalomania (Crowley, 1999), and increasing academic demoralisation and alienation (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Gaita, 1998; Ramsden, 1998). But not all academics are dispirited and/or demoralised. Slaughter & Leslie (1997, p. 218), examining market-like behaviours on the part of universities and academics in Australia's research universities, highlight the 'relatively rapid involvement of Australian academics with the market'. In Australian research centres and institutes, academics 'are willing to invest a great deal of professional energy in winning financial awards so long as the resources secured allow them to maintain or even enhance their place in the status and prestige system and permit some degree of discretionary spending' (ibid p. 18). The authors concluded that this type of commercial activity is going to increase in Australian universities, with many academics buying themselves out of teaching and being well rewarded for initiatives that increase university income.

Conceptual Framework

Quality of academic worklife (QAWL) is conceptualised from a work alienation perspective. Potential conflict in academic is predicated on the rise of managerialism in academe, and on the fundamental contradictions that exist between professional and managerial paradigms for structuring academic work (Nixon, 1996; Randle & Brady, 1997). Theory predicts that academics experience self-estrangement (i.e. work alienation) and lower levels of organisational commitment whenever managerialist work characteristics come into direct conflict with academics' work autonomy expectations (Mottaz, 1981; Hoy *et al.*, 1983; Kakabadse, 1986; Nixon, 1996). That is, the QAWL declines when academic work is reorganised to accommodate managerialist external-control principles, rather than professional intrinsic-control principles.

To incorporate a work alienation perspective of academic work, QAWL is viewed as an attitudinal response to the prevailing work environment. Following previous psychological climate (James & Sells, 1981; Lysons & Ryder, 1989) and perceived work environment studies (Newman, 1977), academics were asked for their work environment perceptions and attitudes towards their work and university. According to Newman's (1977, p. 521) research findings, perceptions 'form the basis [i.e. frames of reference] for [but are conceptually different from] that person's evaluations of [attitudes toward] the work environment'. This perceptual-attitudinal distinction is a key feature of the QAWL Model (see Fig. 1).

Five perceived work environment domains are seen as important to QAWL, since they directly and indirectly shape academics' experiences, attitudes, and behaviour on a daily basis. They are:

- *role stress characteristics* (i.e. the nature of academics' work role expectations and demands: role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload);
- *job characteristics* (i.e. the nature of academics' job tasks: job challenge, autonomy, skill variety, task identity, feedback);
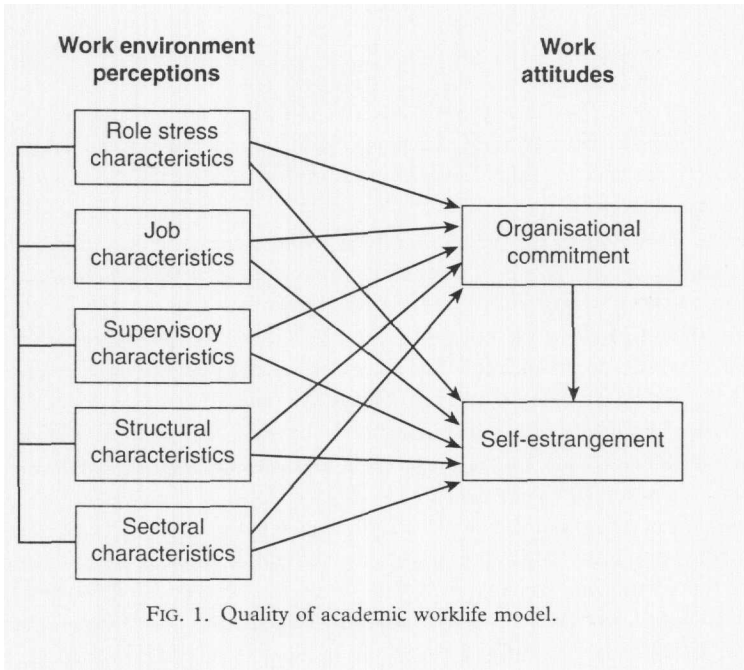
FIG. 1. Quality of academic worklife model.

- *supervisory characteristics* (i.e. the nature of the supervisor–academic relationship: consideration/supportive supervision);
- *structural characteristics* (i.e. degree of university structure shaping/restricting academic job positions and roles: centralisation, formalisation); and
- *sectoral characteristics* (i.e. large-scale changes to the Australian higher education sector such as the end of the binary divide, increased competition, academic entrepreneuralism).

Previous research has established these work environment conditions as psychologically meaningful and significant for most individuals in different work climates (Campbell *et al.*, 1970; Hellriegel & Slocum, 1974; Payne & Pugh, 1976; James & Sells, 1981; Spector, 1986; Blau, 1987; Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996), including Australian universities (Lysons & Ryder, 1989; Mahony, 1996; Winter *et al.*, 1998; Wolverton *et al.*, 1999).

Academics' evaluations of the work environment are manifest in two broad QAWL indicators: organisational commitment (Mowday *et al.*, 1979) and self-estrangement (Miller, 1967; Mottaz, 1981). Theory predicts that academics perceiving incompatible social structural arrangements will experience dysfunctional feelings and false consciousness (Benson, 1973). This debilitating condition is referred to in the literature as a 'crisis of professional self-identity' (Nixon, 1996, p. 5). As a consequence, academics will express low levels of psychological attachment and commitment to their institutions (Lewis & Altbach, 1996), and report feelings of work alienation (Randle & Brady, 1997; Ramsden, 1998).

Three personal (age, gender, marital status) and nine professional (qualifications, position, hours, contract, university service, higher education service, primary work role, discipline area, university type) characteristics variables were designated antecedent variables for cross-sample analysis purposes. Previous academic-related research has included demographic variables to highlight differences in work stress, morale and motivation between academic staff (Copur, 1990; Currie, 1996; Wolverton *et al.*, 1999).

Method

Instrumentation

The Academic Work Environment Survey (AWES) was developed over a period of 14 months to assess the relationships between and among academics' demographic characteristics, work environment perceptions, and work-related attitudes. The 99-item diagnostic instrument was designed to provide a comprehensive measure of the five work environment domains described earlier. To locate relevant measures, ABI-Inform, Psychlit, Sociolit, and Australian Education Index (AEI) bibliographic databases were searched from the years 1970 to 1995 on the topic of work environment measures. Items representing the five work environment domains were sourced for inclusion in the AWES on the basis of their face validity and reported reliability statistics. Three five-point Likert scales measured academic responses: Your Job/Work (1 = never true to 5 = always true), Your University/Workplace (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and Changes To Higher Education (1 = very small impact to 5 = very large impact).

The research setting for the QAWL survey was Chevron University, a large comprehensive institution situated in south-east Australia. Chevron is a research, metropolitan, distance education and international university. In 1997, Chevron employed 2544 full-time equivalent academic staff and serviced 39,648 students (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1998a, 1998b). To assess the relevance of the survey items in an academic work environment, the AWES was piloted across three campuses of Chevron University between March and December 1997. Twelve full-time academics (eight men, four women at five academic levels) participated in 45-minute semi-structured interviews, in which they completed the AWES and made comments on items they felt were: (1) confusing, (2) not applicable to their job/role or work situation, and (3) poorly constructed. The AWES was subsequently reconstructed to take account of each academic's comments and recommendations.

Sample

Surveys were distributed to 319 full-time academic staff stratified by level (five positions) and discipline (five discipline areas). The final sample was 189 academic staff (effective return rate of 63%). Table I indicates the personal and professional profiles of academic respondents. As can be seen, the majority of respondents were male (62%), tenured (63%), aged between 40 and 59 (74%), held a doctorate or master's degree (78%), had 7 or more years' university service (54%), and were employed at the lecturer (38%) and senior lecturer (26%) levels. Most worked in the humanities and social sciences (26%), sciences, (23%) or business (23%) discipline areas.

An exploratory principal-components factor analysis (varimax solution rotation) was conducted on the AWES scale items, to see if they measured common factors and were unidimensional. Inspection of the rotated factor matrix correlation coefficients revealed moderate to high empirical commonality (0.41–0.87) for the scale items, suggesting they did belong together conceptually.

Table II presents reliabilities, means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients for all work environment and work attitude scales. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients ranged from 0.59 (Formalisation) to 0.88 (Consideration). Thirteen of the 16 scales exceeded or approximated Nunnally's (1978) 0.70 criterion for adequate reliability. For all AWES scales, mean inter-item correlations were greater than their respective mean off-diagonal coefficients, indicating moderate to high degrees of convergent and discriminant validity (Dewar *et al.*,

TABLE I. Personal and professional profiles of academic respondents

Category	f	%
Age (n = 187)		
40–59	138	74
Gender (n = 185)		
Male	114	62
Female	71	38
Position (n = 187)		
Associate lecturer	27	14
Lecturer	71	38
Senior lecturer	48	26
Associate professor	21	11
Professor	20	11
Tenure (n = 174)		
Yes	110	63
No	64	37
Qualifications (n = 189)		
Doctorate	85	45
Master's	63	33
Discipline (n = 189)		
Humanities/Education/Arts	49	26
Science/Mathematics/Computing	44	23
Business/Economics/Law	44	23
Engineering/Architecture	19	10
Health Sciences	22	12
Other	11	6
University Service (n = 188)		
< 3 years	41	22
3–6 years	45	24
7–10 years	34	18
10 years +	68	36

1980, p. 123). Correlations, and their respective signs, indicate the strength and direction of variable relationships. For example, significant negative correlations between self-estrangement and job characteristics (-0.43, -0.47, -0.27, -0.32, -0.61) indicate that the more autonomy, skill variety, task identity, feedback and job challenge academics experience, the lower their levels of alienation at work.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics to describe sample characteristics. *T*-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to identify significant demographic differences across the sample. For the survey as a whole, and for cross-sample analysis purposes, academics' quantitative responses were grouped as:

- strongly negative (mean under 2.50)
- negative (mean 2.51–2.90)
- neutral (mean 2.91–3.09)
- positive (mean 3.10–3.50)
- strongly positive (mean over 3.50).

TABLE II. Reliabilities, means, standard deviations and Pearson's correlation coefficients for work environment and work attitude variables ($n = 189$)

Variable	α	M	SD	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12	F13	F14	F15	F16
Role stress characteristics																			
Role Ambiguity—F1	0.83	2.62	0.74	1.00															
Role Conflict—F2	0.62	3.02	0.68	0.40	1.00														
Role Overload—F3	0.66	3.44	0.81	0.13	0.37	1.00													
Job characteristics																			
Autonomy—F4	0.69	3.69	0.57	−0.42	−0.23	−0.33	1.00												
Skill Variety—F5	0.75	3.50	0.62	−0.25	−0.12	−0.00	0.27	1.00											
Task Identity—F6	0.67	3.98	0.62	−0.42	−0.26	0.20	0.56	0.04	1.00										
Feedback—F7	0.62	2.64	0.81	−0.52	−0.26	−0.11	0.24	0.18	0.17	1.00									
Job Challenge—F8	0.79	3.67	0.63	−0.43	−0.22	0.00	0.38	0.56	0.29	0.33	1.00								
Supervisory characteristics																			
Consideration—F9	0.88	3.01	0.71	−0.42	−0.34	−0.13	0.22	0.16	0.13	0.51	0.24	1.00							
Structural characteristics																			
Hierarchy of Authority—F10	0.79	3.10	0.84	−0.30	0.33	0.12	−0.32	−0.25	−0.06	−0.28	−0.22	−0.29	1.00						
Participation—F11	0.85	2.74	0.96	−0.34	−0.02	0.16	0.20	0.38	0.06	0.33	0.40	0.22	−0.35	1.00					
Formalisation—F12	0.59	3.20	0.66	0.12	0.15	0.24	−0.18	−0.03	−0.02	−0.10	−0.02	−0.08	0.41	−0.07	1.00				
Sectoral characteristics																			
System Changes—F13	0.76	3.93	0.71	0.05	0.24	0.31	−0.05	0.08	0.04	−0.11	0.11	−0.14	0.05	0.18	0.27	1.00			
Academic Pressures—F14	0.69	3.32	0.86	0.11	0.28	0.28	−0.03	0.10	−0.07	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.10	0.09	0.29	0.40	1.00		
Work attitudes																			
Org. Commitment—F15	0.83	3.09	0.73	−0.45	−0.44	−0.22	0.30	0.21	0.22	0.34	0.41	0.36	−0.32	0.27	−0.18	−0.11	−0.15	1.00	
Self-estrangement—F16	0.80	2.30	0.64	0.51	0.41	0.14	−0.43	−0.47	−0.27	−0.32	−0.61	−0.33	0.49	−0.39	0.29	0.08	0.17	0.20	1.00

Note: If $r \geq 0.15$, $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed); $r \geq 0.20$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

This five group classification related to the five-point Likert scales used throughout the AWES (i.e. 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Two questions invited respondents to comment on: (1) the current job environment, and (2) large-scale changes to the higher education sector. A qualitative analysis of respondents' comments helped us to understand the nature of the perceived work environment. A deliberate attempt was made to use keywords, grounded in the words and issues of respondents (Turner, 1981). Academics' qualitative comments were grouped using the following keywords (their relative frequency is shown in parentheses):

- role overload/stress (45);
- managerialism (22);
- staff management (18);
- centralisation/hierarchy (17);
- campus relationships (16);
- staff relationships/values (11);
- job security/uncertainty (11); and
- administrivia (6).

The relative frequency of the role overload keyword indicates that stress was the most salient QAWL issue to respondents. Academics reported 'not enough time to do the required tasks/activities to a desired quality' and 'heavy workloads'. Other significant issues to respondents included the 'authoritarian attitudes of government, university and faculty administration' and the 'top down approach from VC [Vice-Chancellor] to faculties' (i.e. centralisation/hierarchy). Problems arising from a multi-campus faculty were also cited (campus relationships), as well as job security and 'uncertainty about an individual's future' (job security/uncertainty). Respondents also noted the increasing time devoted to non-core administrative tasks 'such as marketing and accounting for time' (administrivia).

Findings

Autonomy, Skill Variety, Task Identity, Job Challenge and Role Clarity

Surprisingly, the sample overall strongly agreed that their jobs were characterised by high levels of Autonomy ($M = 3.69$). At the same time, many respondents saw jobs or projects through to completion (Task Identity, $M = 3.98$), were stimulated by the exacting nature of academic work (Job Challenge, $M = 3.67$), and engaged in a fairly wide range of activities at work (Skill Variety, $M = 3.50$). Professors reported significantly higher levels of Job Challenge ($M = 3.98$) than lecturers ($M = 3.54$) ($F[4,182] = 2.59$, $p < 0.05$). Professors also reported more Skill Variety than lecturers ($M = 3.97$ compared with 3.31, $F = 6.18$, $p < 0.05$). Finally, all respondents were clear about the nature of their work roles and responsibilities (Role Ambiguity, $M = 2.62$). Positive job characteristics and role clarity suggest that the core tasks of teaching and research remain major motivating aspects of academic work.

Role Overload and Feedback

Excessive time pressures and unrealistic performance expectations were major issues for respondents at all academic levels (Role Overload, $M = 3.44$). Role overload was found to increase at higher academic levels, with professors ($M = 3.75$) and associate professors ($M = 3.51$) reporting significantly more role overload than associate lecturers ($M = 2.88$)

$(F[4,182] = 4.07, p < 0.05)$. Tenured academics also indicated greater role overload than non-tenured academics $(M = 3.52$ compared with $3.19, t = 2.55, p < 0.05)$. Role overload was not evenly spread across all academic disciplines, with academics from health sciences $(M = 3.65)$ and humanities/arts $(M = 3.54)$ indicating more role overload than academics from business $(M = 3.19)$ discipline areas $(F[5,183] = 2.91, p < 0.05)$. Respondents' comments reveal the negative QAWL effects of role overload:

> The university research expectation versus teaching loads creates stresses due to lack of time and clarity as to whether service to students is more important than own research progress/outcome. Due to this, I find myself constantly hurrying my teaching duties and yet still don't get time for research. In this regard neither teaching/research are highly satisfying due to their causing continual time-related stress. (Associate Lecturer/Business)

> I would say these changes have created situations where staff on [this campus] are overloaded in terms of student numbers. Responsibilities such as teaching load of 1:90—lectures often larger—marking load of 1:90 and administrative duties. Very difficult times. (Lecturer/Humanities)

> Workload has increased dramatically—not enough time to find a quiet corner and cogitate long enough to bear fruit research-wise. (Senior Lecturer/Sciences)

Some of these extra tasks appeared to be tied to the perceived leadership ambitions of senior staff:

> These days, Deans etc. seem to have to change things in order to look as if they have made their mark. We had to completely re-arrange our courses to bring them into line with a different degree last year. This year the degree we brought into line with is being revamped. So we'll have to go through all the masses of administrative arrangements again. Neither change was about the quality of the material. Academia is not supposed to be about 'busy work'. (Lecturer/Sciences)

Other tasks were regarded as imposed 'makework' activities, which decreased personal effectiveness at work:

> Now that the university is pushing information technology and time management, the associated admin. has increased my personal workload because I have to justify it to the university rather than using it to maximise my own efficiency (and hence my contribution to university efficiency). (Lecturer/Engineering)

> The average academic works for the admin. officers who dictate everything, every schedule/timetable, and when they need information, instead of researching it themselves, they draw up a questionnaire and put time limits on the academic. If it is not completed on time—then the academic is blamed. (Senior Lecturer/Health Sciences)

Academics overall reported low levels of professional feedback on their job performance $(M = 2.64)$, with associate lecturers $(M = 2.07)$ and senior lecturers $(M = 2.08)$ reporting the lowest levels. No differences were reported by discipline areas.

Hierarchy of Authority, Participation in Decision-making, Formalisation

In relation to the university's structural characteristics, academics overall indicated moderate to high levels of centralisation and formalisation. Centralised decision-making was reported in terms of a Hierarchy of Authority ($M = 3.10$), and more strongly in terms of low levels of Participation in Decision-making ($M = 2.74$). Male academics recorded significantly more participation in university decisions than their female counterparts ($M = 2.93$ compared with 2.44, $t = 3.46$, $p < 0.05$), and tenured academics indicated higher levels of participation than non-tenured academics ($M = 2.98$ compared with 2.29, $t = 4.97$, $p < 0.05$). Respondents overall reported moderate to high levels of Formalisation ($M = 3.20$), in that they adhered to a large number of written rules, procedures and policies.

Participation in university decisions was found to differ significantly by position in the university hierarchy, with professors ($M = 3.94$) and associate professors ($M = 3.63$) indicating higher levels of participation than associate lecturers ($M = 1.84$), lecturers ($M = 2.40$), and senior lecturers ($M = 2.90$) ($F[4,182] = 35.87$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, associate lecturers, lecturers, and senior lecturers ($M = 3.13$, 3.17, 3.20 respectively) reported significantly higher levels of Hierarchy of Authority compared to professors and associate professors ($M = 2.37$, 2.68 respectively) ($F[4,182] = 5.29$, $p < 0.05$). Comments indicated a high level of disenchantment with the university's hierarchy of authority, and the inability of academics to influence university decision-making:

> The cancelling of the [1998] studies programme did not seem to have been discussed with other academics in the department—and [the] decision was not even announced in a staff meeting. The result is a no recognition feeling ensues. (Associate Lecturer/Sciences)

> The bosses are very remote from the outcomes of the decisions that are made to implement change. I have nothing but disdain for our so called 'change agents'—they know not what they do! I just hope that one day, as per systems theory, they will lose their ascendancy and have the experience of being done over as they do to us. May they topple loudly and heavily. (Lecturer/Business)

> I hate the politics, the bureaucracy, the infantilisation of staff. I hate not *ever* being consulted about changes that impact on us or that we need to implement. (Lecturer/Business)

> Managerial practices are alienating the staff. It is only one-way communication between the academic and the supervisor—top down. (Senior Lecturer/Health Sciences)

> I feel we are losing control of our destiny. Research was more enjoyable for me when part of the former CAE and not considered essential but voluntary. The stress imposed by the hierarchy is counter productive—for sensitive academics, the inner drive should be enough motivation for excellence—external irrelevant stress causes lower real productivity. (Associate Professor/Sciences)

System Changes and Academic Pressures

The sample overall expressed a strong positive opinion to System Changes ($M = 3.93$) in the Australian higher education sector. Respondents strongly agreed that 'the emergence of very large, multi-campus institutions', and 'the creation of a Unified National System' had exerted a very large impact on their current jobs and workplaces. Professors indicated significantly

higher perceived levels of Sectoral Change compared to associate lecturers ($M = 4.28$ compared with 3.54, $F = 3.20$, $p < 0.05$). Academics were strongly positive about certain Academic Pressures ($M = 3.32$), such as 'regulatory mechanisms like quality assurance exercises and performance indicators' and 'increased emphasis on academic accountability and institutional efficiency'. Again, professors indicated significantly greater academic pressures compared to associate lecturers and lecturers ($M = 3.75$ compared with 3.02, 3.16, $F = 2.75$, $p < 0.05$). Comments here tended to highlight a clash of professional-managerialist values (see Randle & Brady, 1997):

> Managerialism has been extremely negative in its lack of understanding of what makes academic work unique and distinctive. The longer-term effects will be damaging where the reputation for quality of intellectual life, concern for individual students and extra curricular/cultural life are concerned. (Lecturer/Humanities)

> I welcome many of these changes when they result in *improved educational opportunities*. The worst changes are [managerialism] and [regulatory mechanisms] as they are mutually supportive of increased roles for those who neither *teach* or [sic] *research*, yet take interventionist roles in delivery of courses, kinds of research conducted, student recruitment, appraisal of staff who *do* teach and research. (Senior Lecturer/Humanities)

> I do not like the changes associated with the creation of multi-campus institutions, particularly since these have required new 'managerial practices' that have largely destroyed traditional collegiate university culture. Productivity measures and general performance monitoring have accentuated this problem. (Senior Lecturer/Business)

> Managerialism replacing collegiality in the academic community—very negative; this is undermining professional ethical academic practice and, despite crisis of decision making 'up' and 'down', ensuring that those who might make the most productive input are routinely dissuaded from attempting to do so. (Associate Professor/Humanities)

Work Attitudes: organisational commitment and self-estrangement

A positive feature of the QAWL is the very low level of Self-Estrangement expressed by respondents ($M = 2.30$). Academics strongly rejected the proposition that they engaged in work activities that provided no intrinsic pride or fulfilment, or that work was purely a 'means to some other end'. A strong positive correlation between Role Ambiguity and Self-Estrangement (0.51, $p < 0.01$), and strong negative correlations between Job Challenge, Skill Variety, Autonomy and Self-Estrangement (-0.61, -0.47, -0.43 respectively, $p < 0.01$), suggest that for many academics work alienation is not an issue given a clearly defined autonomous role and stimulating, diverse job tasks.

   Although academics remain very attached to their jobs/work activities, they do not exhibit the same levels of attachment to their institutions, as revealed by their neutral levels of Organisational Commitment ($M = 3.09$). Organisational commitment was found to differ significantly by age, with academics in the 30–39 ($M = 3.24$) and 40–49 ($M = 3.18$) age groups reporting significantly greater organisational commitment than those in the 25–29 ($M = 2.11$) and 60–64 ($M = 2.63$) age groups ($F[5,181] = 2.92$, $p < 0.05$). No differences in self-estrangement or organisational commitment were found in terms of gender, position, tenure or discipline area.

A number of senior staff made reference to the change in university culture as the underlying reason why they felt disconnected from the institution and no longer valued:

> Management/bean-counters no longer value staff. [Academic] staff morale/ enthusiasm has plummeted—can't wait to retire. (Senior Lecturer/Sciences)

> In recent years the relationships between colleagues have altered as a result of the increasing perception of competition between people in the workplace. I would have liked to comment on this aspect of my work. I have found that the cooperation, study of ideas, aspirations and general academic life has waned in the push to create a more competitive and individually accountable workplace. I feel a strong sense of loss from this. (Senior Lecturer/Sciences)

> The collegiality and philosophy of the university seem to have disappeared under the demands for economic rationalism. If it doesn't make money, ditch it! It's made me realise it's time to leave. (Senior Lecturer/Humanities)

Conclusion

First, the study has highlighted some positive aspects of the quality of academic worklife. They include continuing high levels of task identity, autonomy, skill variety and job challenge. These motivating core job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) satisfy an academic's need for engaging, meaningful work activities: a critical psychological state associated with important outcomes such as job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation and work effectiveness (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Kiggundu, 1990). Another positive work environment feature for academics is role clarity (i.e. low levels of role ambiguity). Academics reported that clear, planned goals and objectives do exist for their jobs, and that they were quite certain as to their job responsibilities. If there is one element of dissatisfaction here, it is that these positive job/role characteristics are counterbalanced by low levels of job feedback. Academics, at all levels, reported that they did not receive information about how well they are doing their jobs. The recent introduction of performance appraisals for all levels of academic staff in the Unified National System (which post-dated the study), as part of the move towards enterprise bargaining, may alleviate this problem by providing, at the very least, an annual assessment and feedback of job performance.

Second, on the negative side, role stress is indicated by high levels of role overload, similar to other reports of academic role stress in Australian (Currie, 1996; Sarros *et al.*, 1997, 1998; Taylor *et al.*, 1998; Wolverton *et al.*, 1999) and UK (Irwin, 1996; Doyle, 1998; Doyle & Hind, 1998) universities. In a period of public sector reform, academics report increased workloads, time pressures, resource constraints, and feeling overworked, stressed-out and demoralised. Amalgamation of ex-CAE institutions into very large, multi-campus institutions, some with distinctly different cultures, has been a personally and professionally painful experience for many academic staff (Mahony, 1996). It seems that, as universities continue to search for efficiencies in a climate of declining public funding, work intensification will become an overriding feature of academic worklife.

Third, large-scale reforms to the Australian higher education sector, included under the ambit of 'managerialism', are exerting a major impact on the immediate university work environment. In an effort to reduce their costs, universities since 1988 have increasingly relied on their entrenched hierarchies of authority to enact delayering, downsizing and outsourcing policies (Cassidy, 1998; DeBats & Ward, 1998). Corporate management practices may deliver significant cost efficiencies for the university, but managerialism comes

at a significant human cost (Solondz, 1995), particularly for those academics with a strong sense of professional identity (Nixon, 1996). An adverse behavioural consequence of managerialism may be academics exhibiting low levels of commitment to their institutions. Ultimately, low levels of commitment translate into organisational rigidity and a culture of stifled learning and creativity.

For comprehensive multi-campus institutions like Chevron University, competing within the Unified National System raises some difficult structural problems. To adapt Festinger's (1957) dissonance phrase, comprehensive universities seem to suffer from 'strategic dissonance'—they want to centralise educational activities to maintain their institutional identity and reputation, but they also want to decentralise to serve distinct market sectors and expand their revenue base. In other words, what used to be a two-dimensional operation has turned, as a consequence of corporate reform, into three-dimensional chess. In seeking to maintain their high status for educational excellence whilst placing increasing emphasis on outside earnings, comprehensive universities are attempting to be entrepreneurial without being flexible. In this push–pull syndrome, it comes as no surprise that academic staff feel increasingly dispirited, demoralised and disconnected from their universities.

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