

Efficiency and effectiveness in higher education

Who is accountable for what?

Dr John Kenny

There is little doubt that the modern university is far different to that of the early 90s and the work of academics has changed considerably over this time driven by the efficiency and accountability agenda. In taking stock of the changes, it needs to be recognised that often the cry for efficiency and accountability has been used as a mechanism for control, cost reductions and to drive particular policy agendas. In broad terms, management practices in the tertiary education sector have shifted from a collegial to a corporate or commercial paradigm.

A by-product of this has been a shift in power from academia to the hierarchy, with a managerial emphasis on deploying staff to meet strategic goals and cost effectiveness. These values do not necessarily coincide with or include the values of academics, so over time the influence of academics over decision making has reduced.

This article presents a discussion of the state of tertiary education in Australia, linked to an account of the recent experiences in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. The aim of the article is to consider the cumulative effects of many of the changes that have taken place in tertiary education over recent years and to question whether the prevailing management paradigm in higher education, aimed at increased efficiency and accountability is the most appropriate way forward.

Introduction

In broad terms, in the last decade or so, there has been a profound shift in management practices in the tertiary education sector from a collegial to a corporate or commercial paradigm. This paper reviews the management literature to explore the underlying assumptions and power relationships driving these changes. It also explores the outcomes of the changes in terms of the overall quality and accountability arguments which are used as the major justification for the change and discusses the effects on academic work and the overall effectiveness of these approaches.

Rationale

There is an extensive range of literature indicating that modern organisations function in a highly complex, competitive world that is increasingly globalised, networked by new technologies, uncertain and unpredictable (Barnett, 2003; Chaffee, 1985; Rae, 1997; Mintzberg, 1994; Combe and Botschen, 2002; Whittington & Melin, 2003). There is a growing recognition that new forms of organisation are required to deal with this environment, ones in which the organisational values are linked directly to a strategic vision based around a culture of learning (McNiff, 2000: 11, Senge, 1990).

Stacey (1995: 485-486) argued that successful organisations in this modern environment need to operate in an almost chaotic state of 'bounded instability'. He argued that organisations have both formal and informal networks. While the formal structures promote order and stability, 'the shifting network of social and other informal contacts between people within an organisation and across its boundaries' are the basis of innovation and change.

Wietzel and Jonnson (1989: 94-96) argued that organisational 'decline is the result of less than effective management of an organization, its resources and the sensing mechanisms related to its long-term survival.' The long term survival of an organisation relies on management receiving 'good information,' taking 'prompt action' and instituting 'effective reorganization' based around 'less directive leadership' and greater inclusiveness for those lower in the organisation who may have valuable information to add to decision making (Wietzel and Jonnson, 1989: 102-103).

Owen (2003: 43) similarly argued for an 'evaluation culture' where staff are included in the decision making process by contributing their knowledge, gained through practice, to the ongoing development of the organisation.

Mintzberg (1994, page 256) called for organisational staff to be seen as 'effective strategists' helping to inform radical strategic direction for an organisation, not as passive 'implementors' of pre-determined actions. Mintzberg (1994) described universities as an example of a 'professional organisation' where the staff are 'notoriously loosely coupled' to the organisational processes, making top-down approaches to management and control in these organisations problematic.

The Management Dilemma

Ramsden (1998) noted a shift towards bureaucratic and corporate management styles in Australian universities over the past decade. With the background above and the clear calls for inclusive and responsive organisational structures based on learning, there needs to be a critical look at the forms of organisation that have been implemented in the tertiary education sector in recent times. In dealing with uncertainty and unpredictability, the management literature indicates that centralised top-down control approaches to management may be not only unwise but also counterproductive. Ramsden (1998) argued that to be effective, universities need to become more entrepreneurial, and he saw the independence of academics as a positive in this context.

Operating in a conventional management paradigm, there have been persistent attempts by government and management to 'codify', that is demystify, or make more 'visible' the work of professionals as a function of centralised planning approaches. Dearman (2003: 26-27) linked this back to the

'accountability crisis' of the 1970s which led to attempts by governments to define and control professional work in the name of greater public accountability'. He noted that this approach has led to the intensification of academic work because of the need to fully account for the use of time due to efficiency related accountability measures.

Crebert (2000), Patterson (2001) and Fenske (1980) expressed doubt about the suitability of such managerial control approaches to the university sector. Lines (2000) was concerned that 'the extensive use of predetermined goals and objectives' has led 'to organisations that are over managed and underled'. Patterson (2001) and Mintzberg (1994) both pointed to the independent nature of teachers and academics in universities as a key reason for the lack of suitability of corporate approaches.

So there is a contradiction in regards to universities between what is advocated in the management literature to deal with complexity and change and the use of top-down centralised managerial control approaches in Australian Universities. As the centralised planning approach has been in widespread use across the sector for over a decade, we should now be in a position to evaluate it as an effective approach for tertiary education. What does the evidence have to say about the outcomes of these effects on the sector?

Exploring Outcomes

The facts indicate that this extended period of emphasis on quality, efficiency and accountability by governments and management has produced profound changes in tertiary education. There is no doubt that many positive benefits have resulted and universities today are quite different places to a decade ago. Aided by the developments in new technologies, they are more flexible in their offerings, more responsive to student needs, have opened up new markets at home and internationally and have undergone unprecedented growth (Lines, 2000; Patterson 2001).

However, over this same period, there has been a progressive decline in government funding and a steady rise in staff-student ratios. In the 'The Higher Education Supplement' of October 25, 2006, under the headline 'VCs want higher fees, fewer rules' Dorothy Illing reported that the government contribution to Higher education as a percentage of revenue is down to 41%, a drop of nearly 20% in 10 years.

According to the Australian Geoscience Council, a professional body representing over 7000 geoscientists, there has been a fall in government outlays on higher education since 1996, from 0.72% of GDP to an estimated 0.52% in 2004. This has led to a shortfall of over \$530 million, had funding kept pace with inflation. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) puts this figure at over \$ 550 million. The Australian Council of Deans of Education has noted also that

In recent years, however, the Commonwealth has systematically decreased its relative share of funding, while increasing its accountability requirements. In contrast, the Council notes that many other states such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and, closer to home, Singapore, have substantially increased direct public investment in education over the same period. (p.3)

This indicates that placing limits on funding has been a key strategy used by government to control the higher education agenda and drive change to make universities more efficient. It has led university managers to strive for new markets and promote change within their institutions.

Teaching is a profession conducted largely in isolation, in a practical sense, but shaped by institutional pressures. Apart from the push to embrace new information technologies, those pressures come in the form of various managerial, market and financial adjustments: the drive to complete PhDs, state scrutiny of research and teaching outcomes, work intensification, pressure to acquire teaching qualifications and a substantial re-framing of student staff relationships. Dearman (2003, p.26)

The question is, having brought about some fundamental change, is the centralised planning approach the most suitable for the on-going development of the tertiary education sector? Is it time the question was changed from 'What is an efficient way to manage higher education?' to 'What is the most effective?'

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Efficiency is not the same as effectiveness. Viljoen (1994: 9) described efficiency as relating to 'how well an activity or operation is performed.' Effectiveness relates to performing the correct activity or operation. In other words, efficiency measures how well an organisation does what it does, but effectiveness raises value questions about what the organisation should be doing in the first place.

It can be argued that the point has been reached in higher education, where the drive for efficiency is reducing effectiveness and the quality of teaching and learning. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) warned of the danger of taking productivity drives too far: that there is a limit to the extent of productivity savings in education, such as trading off productivity savings for salary increases.

As the AVCC indexation report states (p.3), higher education is a 'labour intensive industry'. As in other sectors of the economy, new information and communication technology has been explored as a means of increasing efficiency, however, in education, rather than enabling staff reductions, the adoption of new technologies has actually 'changed the way in which staff support the learning of students.'

In the education sector productivity increases usually translate into increased workloads, higher student-staff ratios and reduced wages. The AVCC noted that student-staff ratios in Australian Universities have grown from 15.6 in 1996 to 20.8

in 2003, an increase of over 30%! In addition, the Geoscience Council noted that the reduced federal government spending on higher education has had a dramatic effect on academic salaries:

Average salaries for our academics are consistently low compared to equivalent positions in Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore, and of course Europe and the US. Assistant lecturers, lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors and professors in Hong Kong for example usually earn between two and three times more than their Australian counterparts. Australian Geoscience Council (2002)

Chapman (2001) expanded on the effects of this reduction of support on quality outcomes:

(the) long-term decline in the relative remuneration of academics... has been of the order of 25 per cent since the early 1980s. As a consequence there have been increasing difficulties in attracting high quality staff, with implications for the delivery of higher education services.

In their report to the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Goodrum, Hackling and Rennie (2001: 60-61) presented data showing how these changes in funding have been affecting education faculties in Australian Universities. 'Even though student numbers have remained static during the 1990s', there has been a 21% reduction in fulltime tenured staff and an 83% increase in casual staff. In one university they pointed to the impacts on the quality of teacher education. 'In 1990, first year primary teacher students participated in 21 to 24 contact hours of instruction compared to 12 hours in 1999.'

Reduced budgets and staffing levels have forced education faculties to reduce the hours of class contact provided to students, adopt low cost, mass lecture and tutorial methods which are failing to produce the much higher standards of professional knowledge and skills, and capacity for educational leadership that are required by modern innovative schools. Goodrum et al. (2001: 163)

If increased efficiency means doing more with less, then the evidence is clear that universities and the academics working in them have become more efficient. In the long run, how effective will continuation of this approach be? What does the increased emphasis on casual teaching mean for the quality and sustainability of research? How will the best people be attracted into the sector? If the long term effect is to reduce the quality of research and teaching, then we must question the assumptions underlying continuation of this approach.

To some degree, in reforming higher education, the easy part has been done. Viljoen (1994: 10) noted that it may be 'relatively easy' to create an efficient organisation, but creating an effective one 'may be far more difficult.' Two critical questions arise if we want effective higher education institutions: 'What should universities do?' and 'What is the best way to manage universities so they will be effective?'

If it is agreed that the core business of universities is teaching and research, then the second question is the critical one.

In classical management parlance, the key stakeholders help to determine the strategic priorities of an organisation. Higher education has numerous stakeholders: government, industry, professional bodies, staff and students and each stakeholder group has its own perspective on what is valuable in higher education which needs to be considered.

For example, Crebbin (1997) described how stakeholders can hold different views in relation to quality university teaching. She noted that, due to their control over funding, government and managers have tended to dominate this discussion resulting in a linear, managerial view of what constitutes good teaching. From this perspective, 'good teaching' can be defined in terms of value adding and the planning process leads to predictable outcomes. In this 'management discourse' quality control is achieved by external imposed requirements such as course approval processes: this 'cause and effect' view means that 'input and outcomes are assumed to have a direct connection'. Thus quality outcomes result from such things as the 'alignment of objectives and assessment, the use of efficiency measures such as 'completion rates and costs' and 'the pressure for mandatory academic appraisals' (Crebbin, 1997: 4, 5). The presumption is that good learning will result from the right inputs.

In contrast to management discourses of control and predictability, academics-teachers talk about good teaching as being uncertain, transient and interrelational... as a multi-dimensional process which has many indeterminate variables and where values come into conflict and outcomes cannot be pre-determined.' Crebbin (1997: 7)

The view of teaching held by academics, as described by Crebbin (1997) has much more in common with the current management literature than the linear management control processes currently practised by government and many institutions. Accepting that there are multiple perspectives on teaching, the danger arises when one view achieves 'discursive domination' over the others (Crebbin, 1997: 3). In essence, Crebbin claimed the management view of teaching and learning has become dominant and has led to a 'shift of power' from academics.

There is now also an inherent contradiction in the dominant managerial view of teaching. Most institutions have responded to calls by employers for graduates who are independent lifelong learners and problem solvers, team players etc. Developing these skills, along with the desired 'deep' learning (Biggs, 2003), requires more skilled teachers who can devise more intensive, carefully planned and varied teaching approaches than the mass lecture approaches of the past, especially in view of the diverse cohorts that now attend university. However the resource reductions already mentioned are working against this.

The same top-down external quality control process can be seen in the emerging Research Quality Framework (RQF). By applying the same arguments as used in the teaching discus-

sion above, the attempts to control research outcomes using external mechanisms, governments and managers are also likely to distort the process and make it ineffective unless they include the voice of academics. The danger is the case where the accountability tail wags the university dog. These linear top-down management and control principles while suitable for the predictable and everyday operations of an organisation, are inflexible and unsuitable to drive change in the modern complex world, and as such, they are likely to be ineffective and possibly even counter-productive.

The problem arises because this management paradigm is designed to promote control and predictability. Thus the 'discourse' becomes dominated by the more powerful stakeholders who control the resources, and that the voice of academics is largely ignored. In purely strategic management terms, the literature indicates that this approach is very unwise and will not lead to good strategic outcomes. The management literature calls for strategic action, based on developing a 'shared vision', which is an inherently consultative process that values the multiple perspectives of people within an organisation (McNiff, 2000; Mintzberg, 1994; Senge, 1990).

Achieving good strategic outcomes is a complex and unpredictable process (De Wit and Meyer, 1999). It relies on a sharing of decision making power with open and critical conversations about issues, rather than one group dominating the conversation and imposing its view. Dearman (2003: 29-30), echoing much of the management literature, described how control in modern information based organisations has to change from top-down 'control authority' to a 'dispersed authority, with a circular flow of responsibility'.

There is however, one other key factor compounding the inclusion of the academic perspective in decision making and this is linked directly to the nature of the profession itself. As Dearman (2003: 26) noted, academia and teaching are isolating professions. It is therefore difficult to find a unified voice for academia and in this sense, academics leave themselves open to manipulation and control by the stronger, more unified voices of other stakeholders.

Ingvanson and Chadbourne (1994, p.38) referred to the 'inevitable tension between the political-democratic and professional forms of authority in any profession.' This tension arises as authorities of a system or organisation attempt to influence the decisions of the professionals within it.

Dearman (2003) described the deliberate and ongoing strategy of managers to limit and control discretionary judgements of professionals and how governments tend to use centralisation of information systems to 'harness technologies of management accounting to the task of challenging the discretionary freedoms of expertise.' He referred to a 'quality hook' that draws in academics by playing on their sense of concern for the quality of what they do and plays into the intensification of their work. He considered this as a form of management

manipulation, a 'sleight of hand' using the rhetoric of flexibility and quality that 'disguises managerial preoccupations with productivity and visibility' Dearman (2003: p.36).

Enlightened managers can do much to encourage academics to find their voice, but ultimately it is up to members of the profession to advance their own interests. What follows is a short case study of how centralised control management and lack of academic input can lead to poor outcomes. It describes the situation in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania from the perspective of some of the academics who worked in the faculty at the time. It illustrates a practical example of many of the principles discussed so far and leads onto the final sections of the paper.

Case study

Between the years 2001-2005, the Education Faculty at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) experienced rapid growth in student numbers as governments moved to address the looming teacher shortage and the University adopted a growth agenda as part of its corporate strategy. However, at the same time, there was a considerable turn-over in staff and a rapid decline in research output.

Because of the increase in the number of students accepted into the Faculty, it could reasonably be expected that it would be in a healthy state financially and there would be a corresponding increase in resources. However, during this time, staff became increasingly concerned by the decision making processes within the Faculty. As teaching workloads increased, there was a perceived lack of any meaningful consultation, a perception of intimidatory tactics by management towards individuals, along with questionable budget and spending priorities. Many experienced staff began to leave the Faculty and were replaced by inexperienced staff who were initially placed on probation.

The current academic Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) at UTAS requires academic workloads to be calculated on the basis of hours. It lists a wide range of duties that could be included in the count, with a maximum workload of 1800 hours per annum. The duties mentioned include those associated with teaching, research, community service and administration that an academic may reasonably be expected to fulfil. This is a clear example of the demand for codification that Dearman (2003) described, as the aim to quantify academic work, by allocating a number of hours for each of the various aspects of the role.

Along with this requirement, the EBA advocates principles of balance, fairness and transparency, but in practice these

concepts have proven to be difficult to implement. Concepts of 'flexibility' are open to manipulation as they mean different things to different stakeholders. Since mid 2005, four workload models have been developed, with varying degrees of consultation, and at the time of writing, October 2007, there is still no agreement formal agreement.

During 2005 there had been a consultative process that resulted in a model being released for consideration. In December 2005, the Dean at the time presented an alternative workload model that, while it had undergone limited staff consultation advocated a workload balance for academics of 50% teaching, 30% research and 20% community service and administration. As this model was presented very late in the year, many staff were unaware of it, but on return were prepared to go ahead on a trial basis.

However, concerns soon began to arise as planning for the 2006 academic year got underway. The model was clearly underdeveloped. It grossly underestimated

the work demands on many individual staff and paid little attention to the research component of academic work. Pressure was placed on staff to teach more classes while a ban was placed on the hiring of casual staff. The result was increased teaching loads and stress.

As the 2006 academic year approached, and citing budget problems, Faculty management progressively increased academic teaching loads from 50% to 60% then again to 70% of a full workload. After attempts by staff to address these concerns with the management failed internally, the staff turned to the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) for support.

The NTEU insisted on a consultative process to develop another version of the workload model which would comply with the EBA. This led to the formation of a staff working party that developed an alternative workload process that won almost unanimous support from academic staff.

However, in the meantime, due to the pressure of the start of semester, and the inherent professionalism concern for the quality of their work, a number of the staff concerned had to carry on with clearly excessive workloads while the process of negotiation proceeded. Human Resources (HR) offered little support to these staff. When formal grievances were lodged, some interviews were arranged with staff who were prepared to come forward on an individual basis, but in each case, the main areas of concern were dismissed or minimised.

As time went on, it became clear that there was little chance of the staff proposal being adopted by the Faculty and even

The model was clearly underdeveloped. It grossly underestimated the work demands on many individual staff and paid little attention to the research component of academic work... The result was increased teaching loads and stress.

more pressure was mounting from the UTAS to increase the teaching loads of academics in the Faculty.

After detailed consultation and feedback, the staff working party proposed a new workload model that was finally accepted by staff in May 2006 with recommendations that it be implemented for Semester 2 and reviewed in October to avoid any further problems of this nature in 2007. However, this recommendation was not acted on by the Dean, even though it had been overwhelmingly endorsed by the academic staff at a faculty meeting.

Soon after, the Dean transferred to another position at UTAS and an interim Dean was appointed. Staff hopes were raised that their concerns would be finally addressed, and there were some immediate improvements. However, the NTEU staff became suspicious that the UTAS executive management were putting pressure on the Faculty to increase teaching loads and reduce support for research. The incoming Dean also failed to ratify the staff developed workload model and instead proposed an alternative process that was based on 80% teaching 20% research and no acknowledged time for administrative or community activities for all academics which unfortunately most staff voted to adopt, overturning the previous decision.

What little support there was for beginning researchers was under further pressure due to the Research Quality Framework (RQF). Despite rhetoric to the contrary, academics in the Faculty seemed to no longer have a right to do research as part of their role: it was becoming more and more a privilege. The lack of progress on workload, despite extensive consultation, highlights problems with the role of an executive Dean in a modern university, the lack of collegiality amongst academic staff in general and an excessive degree of 'flexibility' built into the current EBA at UTAS, with few safe guards to protect the essence of the academic role.

There was growing discontent within the Faculty. With a large number of in-experienced staff in the Faculty, many of whom were on probation, there was a reluctance for individuals to speak out and a lack of awareness of the broader implications of these fundamental changes to the nature of academic work.

There was now a clear dilemma: while the pressure up to this stage had been for increased quantification of academic work, in the name of 'flexibility' the new management was reluctant to commit to a quantifiable workload model that was comprehensive in its documentation of the academic workload and ensured balance and equity across the Faculty. Academic staff were being asked to operate in an increasingly measured and accountable environment without any serious attempt being made to quantify their work. In effect, staff were asked to take on 'trust' that the workload allocation process would operate equitably and transparently. While many academics were initially reticent about attempts to quantify their work, and sceptical that it could be done effectively, some realised that, once

such a regime was in place, unless a serious attempt was made to do so, academics would continue to be disadvantaged. In a system that required academic work to be quantified in terms of hours, any duties that were not quantified were effectively de-valued!

Throughout 2007, this reluctance on the part of managers to fully quantify what academic staff actually 'do' has become increasingly clear. Our suspicion is that behind this resistance is that the fear that the process of truly quantifying what academics actually do would finally expose the extent of 'good will' associated with academic work. It would provide hard evidence of the long suspected fact that many academics are working significantly over what might be considered a fair and reasonable workload, in this case 1800 hours.

The actual drive to 'codify' academic work clearly presents management of modern universities, wrestling with declining budgets with a dilemma. While the University and Faculty were still advocating the importance of research, academics in the Faculty of Education were struggling to maintain their research, community and administrative duties along with increased pressure to undertake greater teaching loads. This pressure seemed to result from UTAS funding mechanisms for the Faculty of Education that emphasised teaching.

At the time of writing, in October 2007, the workload issue for academics has again become prominent. In an attempt to resolve it once and for all, the NTEU pressured the UTAS executive management to require the Faculty to seriously address staff concerns, as it was felt that the University was in effect in breach of the EBA. The evidence was building that inadequate resources was behind the failure to develop an appropriate workload process. The tactic was effective in getting some serious consultation on workloads and some clear gains for staff.

This raises some general questions for academics to consider in the modern corporate environment in which they operate: Where does the loyalty of a Dean and a faculty executive lie in a corporate model of governance? Is their key role now the implementation of corporate strategy rather than representation of the interests of their faculty? How crucial is collegial action in ensuring the academic perspective is taken into account? In this case it was only due to action by the NTEU that any investigation occurred at all. While the final outcomes are not clear, we are sure that the academic role in the Faculty of Education at UTAS will be better as a result. We believe that a fair, transparent and holistic workload model is the right of staff and is not something to be determined by executive convenience.

Case study analysis

This case is presented because it demonstrates many of the principles discussed earlier. It shows the dangers and the

actual detrimental effects on a faculty when decision making power is concentrated at the top in a hierarchical management structure and there is no avenue for a counterbalancing force within the wider organisation.

It explicitly shows a number of the control strategies used to silence academics:

1. Deal with staff as individuals: A classic divide and conquer approach which maximised pressure on the individuals and broke down collegiality;
2. Reduce job security: The appointment of a high percentage of junior, inexperienced, probationary staff reduced corporate memory and increased the chance of staff compliance and malleability;
3. Intensification of work: The increase teaching workloads reduced the ability of staff to stay abreast of the issues or to question the prevailing agenda;
4. Unaccountable management: No mechanism was in place to hold management to account and limited opportunities existed to question decisions.

Ultimately, quality in education and research depends to a large extent on the skills and motivation of academics committed to their work and resourced adequately to do it. It does no service to higher education or to the profession as a whole for academics to remain silent or isolated, even if working diligently and conscientiously to make the system function well. Instead, as a group, academics need to challenge many of the decisions and underlying assumptions currently driving higher education. Academics need to find a way to ensure their view is considered. Ultimately this will ensure more balanced and realistic goals can be developed for higher education that really address the question of quality.

A significant danger for academics is that they will continue to operate as isolated individuals concentrating on their own individual welfare. If academics ignore their collegial and collective strength, then it is likely that their working conditions will continue to deteriorate. For example, Terry Hilsberg of 'Next Ed' noted in 2003 at an educational technology conference: that public (tertiary) education may well become 'the new textile and footwear industry', where academics are part of the 'supply chain' and education is a commodity. He posed a rhetorical question to the audience: 'Why would I pay an Australian Academic \$80 an hour' to run a course when 'I can get an Indian with a PhD for \$20 an hour?'

In addition, the Federal Government's controversial 'Work-Choices' legislation is likely to continue this trend of individualising the workplace. Under this legislation, employees will be offered individual contracts called Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). These are based in contract law and treat

employees as individual contractors, removing many of the protections of industrial law, including the right to seek the protection of a union.

...the political process... is not realistic in terms of monitoring educational resources. At election time, voters are usually asked to consider many issues... [and] education may not be sufficiently in their focus...

Completing the notion of accountability

As a central theme in this paper, the concept of accountability needs to be explored further. Accountability has been spoken of in terms of holding universities accountable to government or academics accountable to their managers. Yet clearly, as key stakeholders, governments

and senior managers in an organisation, are also accountable. They are responsible for the provision of the resources for academics to do their job. Accountability should not be seen as a one-way street.

While systems of performance management and appraisal for academics have proliferated, there has been little discussion of how governments can be held more accountable nor of the suitability of current performance management processes for senior managers. Each of these ideas will now be considered.

Holding government to account

While the ultimate form of accountability for governments is the political process, it seems that this is not realistic in terms of monitoring educational resources. At election time, voters are usually asked to consider many issues and particular specialty areas, such as education, may not be sufficiently in their focus of concern. Some other mechanism is needed, some objective and independently determined set of standards, agreed on by all stakeholders.

Ingvarson (1993) and Ingvarson and Chadbourne (1994) cited Darling-Hammond (1992), who maintained that the accountability processes applied to education are not complete unless they also include standards for the organisation and system in which the practitioners work. This principle leads to the acknowledgement that two board categories of standards must be applied when considering accountability:

1. Standards of Professional Practice (e.g. responsibilities of the various occupational groups).
2. Enabling Standards (involving organisational process and delivery standards).

While a lot has been written about 'Professional Standards' by governments and professional bodies, there is little information on 'Enabling Standards.' These refer to how an organisation or system should support, resource and value the work of the practitioners. It recognises, for example, that effective performance is directly linked to the creation of suitable conditions for academics to do their work to the required level.

It is unlikely that currently any tertiary institutions have specified 'Enabling Standards' for teaching and research. The case above illustrates the difficulty in developing these. There are certainly no standards to define an adequate level of government funding for tertiary education as is evidenced by the decline referred to earlier. Without enabling standards, pressures continue to come to bear on individual institutions and, through the management processes, on individual staff within them to meet arbitrarily set criteria of accountability and governments and senior managers will be able to continually dodge their responsibilities.

The concept of 'Enabling Standards' supports the case for the establishment of an independent body to determine not only performance criteria for academics and institutions, but also for appropriate and independently determined funding standards for higher education.

Such an initiative would remove the issue of resourcing higher education from the political arena and would provide an objective measure against which to gauge the performance of government. Without such standards, the sector will be constantly exposed to political manipulation and ideologically driven agendas with the subsequent dismissal or minimisation of the academic perspective.

Holding senior managers to account

There are existing performance processes for most senior institutional managers, based around establishing 'Key performance Indicators' (KPIs) or some similar set of measures, usually linked to the strategic outcomes of the organisation and often linked to some form of bonus remuneration package.

The problem here is more the paradigm under which the KPIs have been set, the criteria used and who makes the judgements. The argument here is that, to be effective, the performance management process has to encourage and reward the behaviour it values. If poorly designed, these systems can actually work against the desired outcomes (Grant, 2003).

An effective performance management process for executives therefore, needs to reflect and value their role as facilitators of change in complex modern organisations. Judgements of their performance need to be based on the effectiveness of the structures and processes they set-up within an organisation. The criteria should include how well they facilitate real discussion, debate, inclusion and dialogue in their organisation. A new and more complex role has emerged for senior managers, which is less about controlling outcomes and more about dealing effectively with complexity and ambiguity.

The persistence of centrally controlled planning and accountability processes stems from a view of management control of the strategic agenda. In the emerging view, the role of managers is more complex. While they remain responsible for the efficient allocation of resources and on-going operations, they also have a duty to promote creativity and innovation by facilitating learning and capturing the

knowledge generated for the sustainability of the organisation. They are not to simply direct and control the agenda and limit the organisation to pre-set strategic outcomes, but to open up possibilities and support creativity. Kenny (2005).

Thus the role of managers needs to shift from being controllers of pre-determined outcomes to designers of organisations that facilitate high order organisational learning. Key performance measures for senior managers must reflect this significant change in their role. They should be judged against a broader set of criteria and by a broader cross-section of the organisation. The performance appraisal process should include comments by people from all levels of the organisation and include criteria which focus on their ability to develop and resource organisational structures and processes that are deliberately geared for learning (Senge, 1990). This has profound implications for the role of managers and should not be underestimated (Stacey 1995: 486). It challenges many of the tenets of conventional management wisdom and is sure to cause concern for many managers.

Summary

Modern universities function in a highly uncertain and changeable world. Management theory indicates that effectiveness in this environment requires highly adaptable organisations which are inclusive of staff in strategic decision making. Linear top-down strategic planning processes that focus on efficiency and use accountability and quality arguments to drive change are ineffective in dealing with uncertainty. However, these approaches are the dominant management processes operating in tertiary education in Australia. It is time that the focus of the debate about quality education was broadened from looking at efficiency to include effectiveness.

Quality education and research outcomes cannot be mandated by government or university management. Instead they result from a partnership which includes all the key stakeholders. Currently academics have little input into how well institutions perform and are feeling the pressure of increased workloads and lower remuneration. Through greater collegiality, academics legitimately need to find their own voice in tertiary organisations and express their own unique perspective in setting the policy agenda for higher education.

Effective managers in the modern economic climate must focus on organisational learning and design processes and systems that enable and value involvement by all stakeholders and empower staff. They will also see themselves as accountable for objectively determined enabling standards which facilitate full participation in decision making and ensure adequate resourcing is available for academic staff to do their jobs well.

Academics cannot be held solely responsible for the quality of teaching and research at their university. They operate within the resource and policy constraints created by the government

