

# **Corporate Reforms to Australian Universities: Views from the Academic Heartland**

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**Education Stream**

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# **Corporate Reforms to Australian Universities: Views from the Academic Heartland**

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## *Abstract*

This paper presents survey findings relating to academics' work attitudes and responses to corporate reforms within eight Australian universities. Academics (n=1,041) responded to the Academic Work Environment Survey, a diagnostic questionnaire designed to examine the quality of academic work life within universities in Australia (Winter, Taylor, & Sarros, 2000). Academics indicated strong positive responses to items indicative of corporate reforms across the higher education sector (i.e., decreased public funding, rise of consumerism, increased competition, quality assurance mechanisms, academic accountability, entrepreneurialism), reported high levels of role overload (stress) and moderate levels of job involvement and organisational commitment. Value conflict statements indicated academics felt market behaviour mechanisms and business-related principles were compromising the primary goals of teaching, learning and scholarship and exerting a strong negative effect on academic morale and productivity. Negative commitment responses indicated a violation in the 'psychological contract' between academics and their universities (work stress, poor recognition and rewards practices, pressures to pass students are cited as evidence of contract violation). The paper concludes by discussing the types of university leadership and work structures needed to reduce value conflict in academe and build trust between academics and university managers.

The so-called unified national system has proved, in my and my colleagues' experience, a complete and fragmented disaster. The air resounds with cries of economic rationalism. Ho!, accountability forever!, managerialism rules, O.K!; and everywhere the small voices of students and staff grow quieter and quieter.  
(Professor/Humanities, Metropolitan)

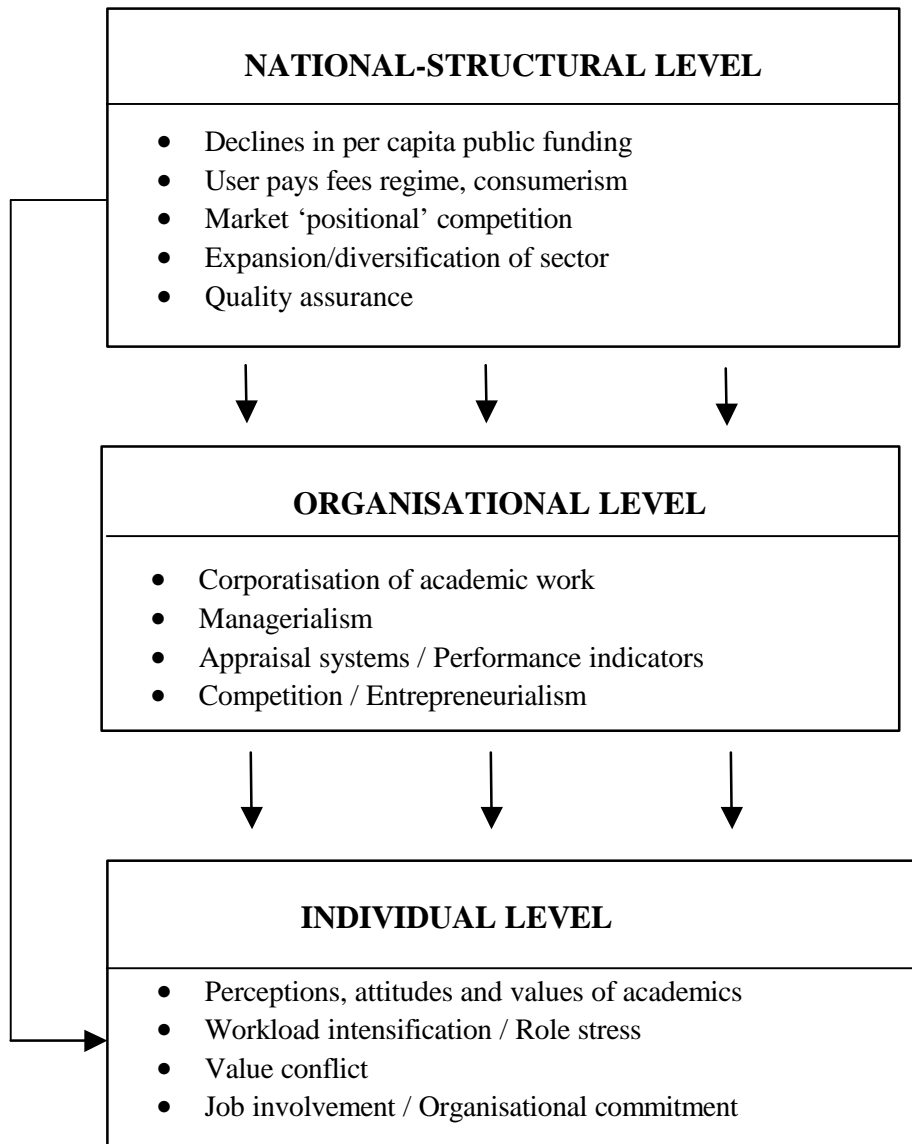
## **Introduction**

Australian universities are currently undergoing a period of massive upheaval and change as they respond to more students, declining public funding and increased government pressures to reform their structures, lower their costs and achieve greater administrative efficiency. In response to these pressures and perceived threats, senior university managers have adopted strong forms of executive control and corporate management principles and practices. Marginson and Considine (2000:9-10), examining the institutional governance of 17 of the 36 doctoral universities in Australia after a decade of corporate reform, report that:

Universities are no longer governed by legislation: they are more commonly ruled by formulae, incentives, targets and plans. These mechanisms are more amenable to executive-led re-engineering than are the deliberations of a council or an academic board, and less accessible to counter-strategies of resistance. They also fit with management-controlled tools such as soft money budgets, commercial companies, temporary institutes for research or teaching, fund-raising and marketing campaigns, all drawn together in a complex web of accountability tied only to the senior executive office.

Corporate reforms of universities represent a fundamental change in the way the university relates to its environment and functions. At the structural level, executive decision making has either supplemented existing hierarchies or supplanted collegial forms of governance (Marginson & Considine, 2000:4). In the search for discretionary and reliable forms of funding, Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), cross-discipline schools and various 'soft money' projects have been created and granted budgetary autonomy. Heads of departments aggressively develop procedures for generating revenues from faculty activity, including income from technology transfer activities and from faculty consulting (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997:20). At the same time, academic identities are "subordinated to the mission, marketing and strategic developments of the institution and its leaders" (Marginson & Considine, 2000:5). Hence, 'frame-breaking' (see Nadler & Tushman, 1989) structural and cultural changes have occurred within the university impacting on the centrality of academic autonomy, professionalism and collegial relations (Buchbinder, 1993; Neave, 1990) and cutting at the heart of traditional academic values (Ramsden, 1998:22-29).

Unlike previous senior-manager centred perspectives of corporate reforms (see Marginson & Considine, 2000; Meek & Wood, 1997), this paper examines reforms from the 'academic heartland' of Australian universities. Following previous academic work environment studies (Taylor, Gough, Bundrock, & Winter, 1998; Winter, Taylor, & Sarros, 2000), individual academics indicated their opinions to reforms across the higher education sector, expressed their feelings towards their work environments and reported their attitudes towards their jobs (i.e., job involvement) and universities (i.e., organisational commitment). To situate academic responses to higher education reforms in Australian universities, a three-layer change framework is presented (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1**  
**Three-Level Change Framework**  
**(Adapted from Parker & Jary, 1995:320)**

The change framework, based on the prior research of Becher and Kogan (1992), was utilised by Parker and Jary (1995) to examine major changes to the higher education sector in the U.K. Parker and Jary (1995) argued that changes in the political, institutional and funding environment (national-structural level) produced forms of corporate work organisation (organisational-level) that increased the power of university management and diminished the autonomy and motivation of academic professionals (professional-subjective level). To examine if similar changes have occurred in the context of the Australian higher education sector, findings from this study are analysed at each level with an accompanying background and commentary.

## **Method**

### **Survey Design**

Academics responded to the Academic Work Environment Survey (AWES), a diagnostic questionnaire designed to examine the quality of academic work life within universities in Australia (Winter et al., 2000). The 99-item survey included items indicative of corporate reforms such as managerialism replacing collegiality in academe (DeBats & Ward, 1998; Winter et al., 2000), the increased emphasis on quality assurance and appraisal systems (McInnis, Powles, & Anwyl, 1994; Taylor et al., 1998), and academic entrepreneurialism (Sarros, Gmelch, & Tanewski, 1998; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). In addition, two open-ended questions asked respondents to indicate their: (1) reactions to changes to the higher education sector, and (2) feelings towards their current work environment.

The AWES also included two well-established measures of an individual's motivation at work: (1) job involvement (Kanungo, 1982), and (2) organisational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). An academic involved in her/his job "implies a positive and relatively complete state of engagement of core aspects of the self in the job" (Brown, 1996:235). An academic expressing commitment to the university indicates a willingness to remain a member of that institution and to exert considerable effort on its behalf (Mowday et al., 1979:226). Studies have shown that job involvement and organisational commitment are distinct constructs (Brooke, Russell, & Price, 1988; Mathieu & Farr, 1991). Five-point Likert scales were used to measure academic responses (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

### **Sample**

The AWES was administered to a stratified (five positions, five discipline areas) random sample of 2,630 academics in eight universities (two sandstones, two metropolitans, two regionals, two universities of technology) between August and September 1998. A total of 1,041 usable surveys were returned, representing a 40 per cent response rate.

Most of the 1,041 respondents were male (65 per cent), aged between 40 and 59 years of age (69 per cent), full-time (91 per cent), tenured/ongoing (68 per cent), employed at the lecturer and senior lecturer levels (30 per cent and 33 per cent respectively), and engaged primarily in teaching and research roles (75 per cent). A majority of respondents indicated they had seven or more employment years at their current university (65 per cent) and in higher education (73 per cent). The sample was representative of the 1998 academic staff higher education population in terms of gender (DETYA, 1998a). By age groups, the sample was under-representative of staff less than 30 years of age and over-representative of staff 50 to 59 years of age. In terms of academic position, the sample included 8 per cent more senior lecturer and 12 per cent less associate lecturer positions compared to the national higher education population.

### **Data Analysis**

For the purpose of this paper, data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics (means) and an analysis of qualitative comments. A five-group classification was used to standardise and compare five-point scale responses across the survey:

1. strongly negative (mean under 2.50)
2. negative (mean 2.51 to 2.90)
3. neutral (mean 2.91 to 3.09)

4. positive (mean 3.10 to 3.50)
5. strongly positive (mean over 3.50).

Qualitative comments were analysed according to grounded theory principles (see Turner, 1981) and grouped using the following keywords (relative frequencies are shown in brackets):

- work intensification/role overload/stress (142);
- value conflict (126);
- government funding/economic rationalism (95);
- managerialism (62);
- recognition/rewards (45);
- students/standards (39);
- quality assurance/performance (18); and
- entrepreneurialism (11).

The relative frequency of the work intensification keyword indicates that stress was the most salient issue to respondents. The relative frequency of the value conflict, economic rationalism and managerialism keywords indicate many academics felt traditional academic values (i.e., collegiality, scholarship) were being compromised by the demands of economic rationalism and corporate reforms to universities.

To situate academic responses to a changing work environment, findings are presented in three sections, namely National-Structural, Organisational, and Individual (as represented in Figure 1), and within each section discussion of the findings is guided by the relative frequency of work life issues mentioned by respondents (see keywords above).

## **Findings**

### **National-Structural Level**

#### **Background**

Corporate reforms of Australian higher education have taken place in response to the emergence of global markets (Pratt & Poole, 2000). Under conditions of globalisation, the state has become less powerful as capital moves easily across national borders to seek the highest rates of return. To not risk disrupting capital flows, governments worldwide embraced 'free market' neo-conservative policies aimed at reducing public services (in the belief that excessive public sector expenditure 'crowds out' more efficient private sector investment), and deregulated their financial and labour markets (in the belief that privatisation is the engine of economic efficiency). Reductions in public sector expenditures, accompanied by large increases in student numbers, meant that less higher education funds were provided by government in constant dollars per student terms (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997:209). This block grant funding constraint precipitated campus reactions of a 'resource dependence' (Pfeffer & Salanick, 1978) nature leading institutions and staff to engage in 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997:8) and to compete vigorously for external funds. Academic capitalism in Australian universities was promoted by a managerialist ideology that values competition, individualism, managerial prerogative, and labour market flexibility (Butfoy, 1999; DeBats & Ward, 1998; Terry, 1995).

In the 1980s, corporate reforms of Australian universities accelerated in the context of economic rationalism, an approach to economic management that “allows the maximum space for unfettered individual choice [via private markets] and minimum coercion by government” (Orchard, 1998:22). Central economic agencies, such as Treasury and the Department of Finance, began to dominate the autonomy of market-oriented departments such as social security, health and education (Pusey, 1991). This dominance was exercised through central control of budgeting (to limit and target expenditures) and a greater reliance on corporate management practices in program administration (to plan, monitor and control the most efficient use of resources). Between 1987 and 1998, “the government share of funding of higher education fell from 85 to 55 per cent” (Marginson and Considine, 2000:57). In 1993, the Commonwealth Government established the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE) to assist the government in budgeting quality assurance funds and to help students assess ‘value for money’. Accompanying a private sector model of public management was an ideology that viewed higher education as a resource to serve national economic priorities (Mahony, 1992:228) and an acceptance that bureaucratic public services were incapable of providing cost effective services to consumers (Hughes, 1998:58-59). According to Professor Peter Coaldrake, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the Queensland University of Technology, the most important outcome of these changes was the fact “that money, whether public or private, no longer came without strings attached. Funds were either earmarked at the outset, or else allocated on grounds of efficiency and effectiveness” (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998:148-149).

Successive Australian governments have viewed deregulation of university fees and market competition as the most expedient ways of securing economic efficiency across the sector. Since 1989, Australian students undertaking award courses at Commonwealth-funded higher education institutions have been required to pay approximately 20 per cent of the full cost of their tuition through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). The primacy of the market is evident in the government’s move to a differentiated HECS system whereby HECS fees vary according to high demand (e.g., medicine, dentistry, law) and low demand (e.g., humanities, arts, education) course disciplines. The argument for the extension and intensification of market competition has been supported by government reports, most notably the Learning for Life Report (DETYA, 1998b) which recommended allowing universities to set fees for all students. The ‘voucher’ system of funding for universities (rejected by the Federal Government after a community backlash) has been welcomed by Vice Chancellors who endorse some type of market-driven funding system based on student preferences.

In 1989, there were 441,000 students enrolled in Australian publicly funded universities and by 1999 there were approximately 686,200 students (DETYA, 1999b:37). Over a ten-year period student numbers increased by over 50 per cent reflecting the shift to a mass higher education system. To cushion the falls in government funding, universities engaged in entrepreneurial activities (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), particularly in the marketing of international education (Maslen, 1998). Between 1989 and 1999, the numbers of fee-paying overseas students increased by 35,000 (DETYA, 1999a:42). In 1999, fees from this group totalled \$791 million compared with \$17 million from domestic undergraduates and \$178 million from domestic postgraduate students (Illing, 2001:39). In 1998-1999, student contributions (HECS, full-fees) constituted approximately 30 per cent of the higher education sector’s total operating revenue of \$8.5 billion (DETYA, 1999b:6). At a recent Australian Higher Education Industrial Association conference participants were told “that as academics

and universities pursue external funds for institutional survival, government-funded activities such as teaching in HECS-funded programs risked becoming marginalised” (Richardson, 2001:35).

## **Findings**

### *Government Funding and Economic Rationalism*

Academics strongly agreed that “decreased public funding and increased private funding of higher education” (M=4.44) and “the rise of consumerism and a ‘user-pays’ fee regime” (M=3.83) were changes exerting a very large impact on their current jobs. For respondents, economic rationalism was having a detrimental impact on the quality of education available to students:

Angry at the destruction of an important institution by half-baked policies of economic rationalism. Angry at the deteriorating quality of education available to students, due to changes in Govt. support for higher education. Angry at the impediments to research imposed by so-called “competition” in higher education. Disappointed that what was once a fulfilling career is now the preserve of hacks and flunkeys. (Lecturer/Health Sciences, Regional)

Economic irrationalism has a lot to answer for in destroying security, lifestyles, mutual respect and all those intangibles that make for a good society. Applied to Universities it is having disastrous consequences and destroying values of intellectual pursuit. (Senior Lecturer/Science, Sandstone)

I think that the whole concept of higher education as we’ve understood it until now is being completely subverted by the demands of corporatisation and economic rationalism. We are starting to turn out graduates who are reasonably well qualified in a narrow subject area, but are poorly educated. Now, this might be OK - if we want universities to train people for the workforce, then we’re heading in the right direction - but it won’t give us a “clever country”. Degrees are narrowing in focus in response to “market demand” - I would argue for broader UG degrees rather than narrower (I’m against the trend, as usual). Many of our graduates are setting themselves up for miserable working lives because they lack diversity in their knowledge - and this is largely “our” fault. I am pretty pessimistic about the future. (Associate Lecturer/Science, Metropolitan)

### *Value Conflict*

A large number of academics expressed value conflict with respect to funding cuts and corporate reforms across the higher education sector. Academics regarded market behaviour and business-related principles as inappropriate to higher education and the primary goals of teaching, learning and scholarship:

It is a tragedy frankly - the application of business principle(s) to higher education has been a disaster in terms of intellectual freedom, creativity and research innovation. ‘Competition’ has no place in public institutions in my opinion - other mechanisms to assure quality and service are much more appropriate. It has caused conflict and division within this university as cash starved Schools and Faculty fight over the inadequate carcass of funding provided by the government. (Lecturer/Humanities, Regional)

The university system is being cynically attacked. Although there are inefficiencies and some poor performers, mechanisms used to redress these problems are inappropriate. Education is mis-specified as 'a commodity' or 'product'. Research cannot be measured best by publication counting. Students are not customers and do not always know best; universities are not an 'industry'. I feel like what I value about university education is not valued by university administrators and policy makers. (Lecturer/Business, Sandstone)

I accept it - but I don't necessarily like it. The large change in ethos of the institution to a point where students and staff are increasing ranked lower in importance than dollars and statistical data saddens me greatly. I survive, and I find meaningful and worthwhile things to do for teachers and students - but with decreasing support and recognition from the institution. (Associate Professor/Education, UOT)

The changing nature of universities, qua "institutions" from the primary task of educating! (educate, "to lend from") with roles of teachers/learners, to corporate activities aiming at the commodification of knowledge with roles of provider/customers leads to a changed "reality" of university experience. The focus on numbers of paying enrollees distracts from the profession of teaching/learning and diminishes the qualitative value of the experience. Political activity and reduced academic freedom are entailed by this change. (Lecturer/Business, UOT)

### **Commentary**

The disdain with which academic respondents feel education is mis-specified as a commodity or product is indicative of value conflict in academe. Academics are contemptuous of economic rationalist policies that relegate higher education to short-term macroeconomic policy goals such as "maximising vocational training curricula while minimising broader (liberal) educational curricula" (Patience, 1999:67). Academics express value conflict with respect to policy reforms that treat universities as corporate entities created for the expressed purpose of dispensing degrees and generating large numbers of 'job-ready' graduates (Clarke, 1998; Coady, 2000; Crowley, 1998). Academics tend to share the view that universities are first and foremost centres of learning (Newman, 1982) and as such, fulfill "a central cultural and ethical role for society at large" (Coady, 2000:6). Comments indicate academics feel this role is severely compromised when cuts to government funding forces universities to engage in corporate activities aimed at marketing education and generating income.

### **Organisational-Level**

#### **Background**

In Australian universities today, generating discretionary funds is a key objective. The Enterprise University has emerged in Australia (see Marginson & Considine, 2000) in a climate of reduced government support and 'user-pays' for educational services. As a result, universities have been pushed and pulled in the direction of competing in a quasi-market arena for more and more of their operating funds (Marginson, 1997). In the push towards a more market-driven university, collegiate decision making is in decline and educational and scholarly goals are being challenged and diminished by a new set of corporate and financial goals (Winter et al., 2000).

To achieve strategic targets and improve their competitive position in a global education marketplace, university leaders have embraced the tenets and practices of managerialism (Clarke, 1998; Crowley, 1999; Ellingsen, 1999a; Winter et al., 2000). Concomitantly, there has been a steady decline in the culture of the collegium and an increase in the corporate and enterprise cultures of Australian universities (Marginson & Considine, 2000:3-6; Ramsden, 1998:32-34). Governing councils (e.g., senates, academic boards) had been reformed “so as to render them more akin to corporate boards, and less representative in form” (Marginson, 1999:7). Education objectives have been formulated into strategic planning statements as ways of producing knowledge as a marketable, saleable commodity to differentiated segments of the customer (student) population. Flexible learning technologies have been embraced to facilitate the transmission of course materials across national boundaries at low cost (Lewis, 1998; Mazzarol & Hosie, 1997). To promote a managerialist work culture, senior leader-managers have espoused pragmatic business ideologies such as becoming ‘lean and market-driven’. Business-speak is now the dominant language in academe. Vice Chancellors have become Chief Executive Officers rather than leaders of academics (Butfof, 1999:19). 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, 1998:55). The language of ‘middle managers’, ‘customers’ and ‘products’ has displaced the academic language of deans, students and courses. At the same time, corporate forms of work organisation have been introduced under the guise of centralised quality assurance mechanisms, staff appraisal, and accounting systems (Taylor et al., 1998).

A key element of the enterprise culture is the encouragement and expansion of entrepreneurial activity (Kennedy, 1996; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Universities look to corporate sponsors for funding of their academic programs. For example, Deakin University’s commercial arm Deakin Australia manages, delivers and brokers all education and training for Cole’s supermarkets (Healy, 1999:35). Universities also value the need to publicise their research to distinct business and customer groups. For example, at Central Queensland University a former football administrator and CSR manager was appointed to the position of Vice President (Corporate Development) “to increase business and industry investment” and “foster a culture of entrepreneurship and revenue-raising across the university” (Illing, 1998:35). Entrepreneurial activity is also evident in the marketing of degrees to international full-fee paying students. Slogans in marketing material such as “degrees that pay for themselves over and over”, and “your job prospects are about to move with the speed of light”, focus on the market worth of degree credentials (Crowley, 1999:26-27).

## **Findings**

### *Managerialism*

Academics indicated strong positive responses to the statements “managerialism (i.e., business-related ‘managerial’ practices) replacing collegiality in the academic community” (M=4.09), an “increased emphasis on academic accountability and institutional efficiency” (M=4.04) and “institutional pressures to increase productivity through quality assurance mechanisms, appraisal systems, and performance indicators” (M=3.85). Comments indicated negative effects on collegiality and creativity associated with this cultural change:

The tide of managerialism is the sickest of all the changes being forced upon us. The principles of managerialism are entirely inconsistent with scholarship. Universities are

a community of schools, not a herd of academics under the control of half-witted, poorly educated mean spirited managers, who have no concept of what free thought is. Managerialism acts as a significant open-clipping constraint on creativity and the development of collegiality. (Lecturer/Science, UOT)

I am quite positive towards my school and immediate colleagues. However financial and administrative pressure on and within the university as a whole is turning Schools and Faculties against one another in an attempt to survive. This is destroying old collegiality and also broad based education. Managerialism by the upper echelons has now destroyed the old idea of a University. (Senior Lecturer/Science, Sandstone)

The current environment is debilitating. There is an increasing mood of anxiety and insecurity about continuing employment which has encouraged a defensive attitude among staff. This has heightened staff emphasis on their careers rather than the job. The result is an uncoordinated pursuit of individual agendas at the cost of collegial, collective objectives for the university. There is an increasing belief that university “managers” do things to staff rather than for staff. (Senior Lecturer/Humanities, UOT)

I’m bemused by the culture change in universities with the emphasis on accountability and producing a corporate product. It seems to stifle curiosity in students and individuality among staff. Am looking forward to the next zeitgeist. (Senior Lecturer/Health Sciences, UOT)

Respondents indicated managerial policies and practices were exerting a negative effect on their morale and productivity:

Managerial practices have alienated us from the workplace to a considerable degree. This has not reduced my passionate commitment to my research and teaching but it often saps all my energy so I literally waste moments agonising over the latest humiliating treatment. I am struggling to learn to ignore the environment I work in so that I can put my energy into my work. There is a huge human cost of this on me, my health and on the others I work with. (Professor/Education, Regional)

The environment is becoming increasingly over-managed, less sensitive to educative rather than economic ends, less supportive of staff who have to work with students rather than with “administrators” and hence less attractive as a location in which to follow one’s vocation. All in all, this place is the merest shadow of what it was just 10 years ago, a sad reflection of federal government fiscal policy, and of the lack of vision of both vice chancellors and their underlings in Australia. (Lecturer/Science, Metropolitan)

It is a bad time to be an academic. The university has become a degree factory, administered by incompetent “managers” - without formal management training - who see only the budget bottom line and who exaggerate the relevance of new technology. Students are resented; teaching is downgraded; research is hindered by grants policies which prize the practical above pure research. Finally there is little civility left. There is no morale among academic staff and the community of scholars is now a supermarket (a badly-run one at that!). No one I know wants to stay! Bring back Newman. (Associate Professor/Humanities, Metropolitan)

Managerialism pervades everything. Many of its features actually reduce productivity due to staff alienation eg. resentment, reduced cooperation/communication, feelings of being exploited. The informal side of productivity has been squeezed out. It seems that staff and student morale are not seen as important, yet ought to be, “belief” in the university sinks. Staff loyalty has reduced, as staff openly state their belief that they are “fodder”. (Senior Lecturer/Architecture, UOT)

### *Students and Standards*

Comments highlighted pressures to pass students in a climate of ‘user-pays’, market competition and declining educational standards:

Whilst I am highly dedicated it seems that EFTSU money is more important than student performance and students who I deem at risk and who should fail are given repeated opportunities to continue on. Student complaints carry much weight and I think this is alarming. (Associate Lecturer/Education, UOT)

Changing nature of universities including - falling of standards; pressures to pass students, no matter that their work may be poor; increasing interference/oversight in assessment to make sure it’s not too hard rather than too easy; poorer standards of preparation, scholarship in academic work. (Lecturer/Health Sciences, UOT)

I feel quality of unit teaching and ideas covered suffer at the expense of developing courses which will attract the most students. Relatedly, I feel standards are dropping as a result of having to get students through so as to keep them on the books. That is, students who should fail are passed through. (Lecturer/Humanities, Regional)

We seem to be in the grip of a market orientated philosophy which pays long lip service to the needs of students. The only thing that seems to matter to the university is attracting as many students as possible and failing as few as possible. It has been suggested to me by senior staff that it is ‘not desirable’ that overseas fee-paying students should fail any subject on the grounds that if they do - they might go elsewhere. (Senior Lecturer/Humanities, Sandstone)

### *Quality Assurance and Performance*

A number of academics regarded quality assurance and performance indicators as not justifiable in terms of time and cost:

Quality assurance mechanisms and practice have become “ends” unto themselves. Quality is just sacred talk that people feel they must adhere to (i.e. documentation driven quality, documentation drives efficiency etc). Also resources are wasted on bureaucratic process of planning (i.e. corporate planning divisions creating reports after report - but really what changes have they made to the quality of the students produced? Very little I would argue). (Professor/Health Sciences, UOT)

“Quality assurance” programs, while good in principle (we do need to be properly accountable!) are mostly a giant waste of time in terms of the output compared with input work load. (Professor/Health Sciences, Metropolitan)

Increased time spent on quality assurance mechanisms and performance indicators are a terrible waste of time and does not have the desired effect. Only appointing the right personnel in the first place, and sufficient funding does. (Senior Lecturer/Humanities, Sandstone)

### **Commentary**

Findings indicate that academics feel traditional academic values are being compromised by corporate values and managerialist styles of governance. Academics resent the decline of collegial relations within their institutions (Butfoy, 1999; Crowley, 1999; Martin, 1999; Winter et al., 2000) and express negative views towards excessive accountability mechanisms and quality assurance practices (Martin, 1999; Nixon, 1996; Winter, et al., 2000). Academics also question the educational value of corporate practices that ‘dumb down’ (Clarke, 1998:56) academic programs or convert them into ‘digital degrees’ (Crowley, 1999:24) in order to increase student enrolments and cash flows. Recent events indicate educational standards are falling due to pressures to accept overseas students into courses regardless of their standards of English (Ellingsen, 1999a; Kissane, 2000). Institutions, such as Monash University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Victoria, have reorganised their grading system so that credits, distinctions and high distinctions can be achieved with lower scores than previously.

As Marginson and Considine (2000:235) note in their study of university governance, academics do not have much understanding of their university at the organisational level, nor do they identify strongly with the university’s purpose or direction:

. . . Stretched by the day-to-day demands of teaching, research and professional service – all of the academics we spoke to were working hard – [but] they had little time to take in university concerns. Mostly, they responded to what little they knew of the bigger picture with an all-too-easy cynicism. Plainly, the Enterprise University is not yet *their* university. For all its undoubted capacity in new communications, data gathering and informal networking, the more professional university management of this era has yet to succeed in drawing the average academic into its strategic perspectives and its institutional objectives.

According to Clark’s (1998) study of five entrepreneurial universities in four European countries, universities will become more adaptive and entrepreneurial when they manage to integrate new ‘managerial points of view’ with traditional academic values. Importantly, integration has to occur within the ‘academic heartland’ (i.e., academic disciplines, old and new) since it is here innovations are most likely to fail and the “life of the institution proceeds largely as before” (Clark, 1998:8). Clearly, at the academic department level, value integration has a long way to go in Australian universities.

### **Individual-Level**

#### **Background**

During 1995 and 1996, Martin (1999:6-24) surveyed 160 academic staff in the UK and Australia about their experience of how academic work had changed over the previous five to ten years. Four issues were most emphasised by staff:

- consultation – or lack of it;
- accountability – or too much of it;
- vision – or lack of it; and
- valuing people – or lack of it.

A majority of staff (more than 70 per cent) in 118 non-leadership positions (senior lecturer, lecturer, tutor/assistant lecturer) commented on the lack of consultation, excessive accountability measures, the lack of vision of senior leaders, and feeling not valued as dominant concerns (Martin, 1999:15-22). Comments indicated lecturing staff perceived a lack of consultation as the antithesis of traditional academic values based on open discussion and the sharing of information. In contrast, leaders (pro vice-chancellor/deputy vice-chancellor, deans, heads of department, heads of course) viewed staff consultation as the price paid for efficient university decision-making (Martin, 1999:15-16). Clearly, leaders and non-leaders view consultation from different perspectives and functions in universities. A majority of staff in leadership (65 per cent) and non-leadership (72 per cent) roles also believed that senior leaders showed inadequate or inappropriate vision or direction (Martin, 1999:17-22). Staff expressed a shared concern that universities were often moving from crisis to crisis rather than working towards a ‘shared’ vision of the future. Staff in leadership (77 per cent) and non-leadership (88 per cent) positions also commented on feeling not valued at work.

In respect to accountability measures, “80 per cent of staff in non-leadership positions complained that accountability measures were excessive” (Martin, 1999:17). Staff resented having to spend an increasing proportion of their time filling in charts, forms and proformas – time that could be spent on more productive and motivating work activity. Academics regard these bureaucratic tasks as ‘makework’ activities (Winter et al., 2000:288). McInnis (1996) and Currie (1996) in Australia, and Parker and Jary (1995) and Nixon (1996) in the UK, provide evidence to suggest excessive accountability measures are partly responsible for diminishing the motivation and commitment of academic staff.

Higher education reforms, and the associated government/institutional demands for efficiency and public accountability, have intensified academic workloads in Australia. Studies of academic work roles in Australia between 1994 and 1999 confirm that academics are working longer hours, spending less time on teaching, and more time on administration work (DETYA, 1999c). In a national survey of 2,609 academics from 15 universities across five states, 40 per cent of academics were found to work more than 50 hours a week, 56 per cent reported their job was a source of considerable stress, and 55 per cent believed their hours had substantially increased over the last five years (DETYA, 1999c:1-3). Academics reported role overload in terms of having to spend more time on administrative tasks such as quality assurance activities and performance reporting (an average of 8.4 hours per week).

## **Findings**

### *Work Intensification*

Most respondents rated role overload, a stress characteristic indicated by excessive work/time pressures, as a characteristic of their current work environment. Academics rated “too much work for one person to do” (M=4.34) as an overload characteristic that threatened their health and indirectly the quality of their teaching and research activity:

Challenging, frenetic, under resourced, goal posts continually shifting. Universities are changing their role in society but seem uncertain of their new directions so we live in a state of perpetual change weighed down with endless form filling and meetings that distract and divert us from our primary roles of teaching and research. I have 3 PhD students, 5 Hons. students, I am responsible for a whole degree programme. I teach in topics with 100-150 students. I am on university and government committees. I work no less than 60 hrs/week and I have no secretarial or administrative help and share 1/2 a technician for my research. I am a person of great energy but I am becoming exhausted by the demands of the system. I no longer have any personal time! I would hate to be a young academic with a family in the current university climate.  
(Associate Professor/Science, Metropolitan)

Massive teaching and admin responsibilities threaten to overtake my research. Although the students are very bright and mostly highly motivated, the teaching hours (10-12 hrs p.w. of seminars intervals plus 2 hrs lectures p.w. plus PhD and Masters supervision) plus crunching marking demands and enormous admin responsibilities, make life difficult. (Associate Lecturer/Science, Sandstone)

Very large increases in class sizes have not been adequately compensated with increases in staffing and resources. Doing more with less has most of us at breaking point. My typical week is about 32 hours for 60% appointment - this is about 60% of what my colleagues work. I feel sure that university management can't realise the extent to which everyone is overwrought by this workload. (Lecturer/Architecture, UOT)

Decreased public funding has had the greatest impact on all humanities faculties. The increase in workload due to reductions in both academic and general staff has been dramatic. Concomitantly there has been a marked increase in ill-health (both physical and mental) amongst my colleagues, because we've all been asked to do more than is possible. These stressed conditions have led to less research productivity and poorer quality in teaching. (Senior Lecturer/Humanities, Regional)

Too much to crowd in to reach top quality. Only get work done by evoking a 60 + hour week and research is suffering badly. (Associate Professor/Science, Regional)

### *Recognition and Rewards*

Academics indicated they felt their effort and loyalty had not been matched by university recognition and rewards:

The institution with its ideology of education for its own sake and with its atmosphere of collegiality, has given way to the corporation, where making money and churning out graduates has banished the old institutional ideology. There is no longer any reason for being loyal to one's employer, since loyalty is not reciprocated by management. (Lecturer/Humanities, Regional)

My experience has been that I receive much greater recognition for my teaching and research efforts from my lay colleagues in the profession of optometry. I find they are willing to spend quite a bit on money attending my courses arranged independently of

the university. This seems to reinforce the notion that the problem lies with the university administration rather than the quality of my efforts.  
(Senior Lecturer/Science, Sandstone)

Despite producing high quality work I feel devalued. I have experienced intense stress due to work overload. I intend to pursue a career outside academia and leave as soon as it is feasible. (Lecturer/Education, UOT)

The staff does not seem to be valued, either for intellectual input or personal achievement, by the department administration. The administrators do not have interest in acquiring knowledge about the day-to-day inner workings of my department, in promoting either individual or department development, or in fostering an improved sense of camaraderie within this institution.  
(Lecturer/Humanities, Sandstone)

Education was why I became an academic - not to become a pan-handler. This is part of my now rather intense dissatisfaction with my job - which I now see merely as a job, whereas 10 years ago it was almost like I thought of it as a "vocation". I am no longer willing to make sacrifices for my Uni since my Uni no longer gives a damn about me as an individual. (Unknown/UOT)

### *Entrepreneurialism*

Respondents indicated an "increased emphasis on academic entrepreneurialism and fee-raising activities" as a change exerting a very large impact on their jobs ( $M = 4.04$ ). Comments indicated some value conflict vis-à-vis the pressures to raise internal revenues and the professional role to educate and facilitate learning:

I abhor the commercialisation and commodification of higher education and the way education technologies are being seen as a means of providing factory style education instead of using them to make learning more interesting and challenging. I feel that the so-called postmodern uni is not a place for me and I am reviewing my options.  
(Senior Lecturer/Business, Sandstone)

At present the pressure to raise funds and push increasing numbers of students through our courses means that developing imaginative teaching programs and engaging in research is almost impossible. I spend most of my time marking essays and consulting with students who lack the requisite skills to pass, and who expect unprecedented levels of support. (Lecturer/Humanities, UOT)

(In relation to the item 'Increased competition between institutions for fee-paying student income') - I am no longer a scholar, I am a saleswoman. This is a travesty of everything education should stand for. (Senior Lecturer/Humanities, Sandstone)

The need for universities to be more entrepreneurial in seeking funding greatly erodes not only job satisfaction, but seriously undermines a quality education system. Mostly this is in the form of content - the eradication of critical analysis in favour of courses designed to appeal to the untutored demands of business and the misguided perceptions of 'consumers'. The alignment of 'business' and 'economic' (as if the two were synonymous) in your faculty title (sic), is an example of these insidious practices.  
(Associate Lecturer/Business, Metropolitan)

### *Work Attitudes*

Academics overall reported moderate levels of job involvement ( $M = 3.32$ ). Across the sample ( $n=1,012$ ), 40 per cent of staff expressed low job involvement, 55 per cent high involvement, and 5 per cent a neutral response (approximately 50 per cent of associate lecturers and lecturers indicated low levels of involvement compared to 25 per cent of associate professors and 28 per cent of professors). Respondents indicated strongly they were “very much involved personally” in their jobs ( $M = 4.62$ ) and liked “to be absorbed in [their] jobs most of the time” ( $M = 3.63$ ). Limits to job involvement were indicated by negative opinions to the statements “I live, eat and breathe my job” ( $M = 2.26$ ) and “most of my interests are centered around my job” ( $M = 2.79$ ). Comments indicated many academics were intrinsically motivated by teaching and research job tasks (McInnis, 1996) but demotivated by mundane ‘administrivia’ (Currie, 1996).

Academics expressed moderate levels of commitment to their universities ( $M = 3.23$ ). Across the sample, 40 per cent of staff expressed low commitment, 50 per cent high commitment and 10 per cent a neutral response (over 40 per cent of professors and associate professors expressed very high commitment compared to 20 per cent of lecturers). Academics expressed strong organisation commitment in terms of “really caring about the fate of this university” ( $M=4.22$ ), “being willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected to help this university be successful” ( $M=4.04$ ) and being “proud to tell others that I am part of this university” ( $M= 3.78$ ). Strong positive responses indicated high levels of emotional attachment to the university (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979).

Academics responded negatively to the statements that their university “inspires the very best in the way of job performance” ( $M=2.46$ ), “is the best of all possible universities for which to work” ( $M=2.50$ ) and expresses similar values to my own ( $M=2.55$ ). Negative commitment responses reveal an imbalance in the ‘psychological contract’ between academics and their institutions (Rousseau, 1995; Tipples & Krivokapic-Skoko, 1996).

### **Commentary**

Corporate work practices have accelerated the demands for staff to work smarter and harder, especially in situations where teaching and research values are high. Academics in teaching and research roles face multiple and contesting job demands and will continue to do so in the future (DETYA, 1999c). Lecturers are expected to prepare technology-rich learning materials and carry regular teaching loads whilst being productive researchers. This means impossible workloads for the majority of lecturing staff and associated role stress (Maslen, 2000). Low institutional commitment to teaching also contributes to work stress (DETYA, 1999c:16). Staff at higher levels do not favour much better. The pressure to secure external grant funding, maintain a quality research profile, raise external revenue, and carry large administrative workloads also increases the stress levels of senior academic staff (Sarros, Gmelch, & Tanewski, 1997, 1998). Balancing the roles of researcher and teacher, leader and manager, and budgeting in the context of rapid change often exceeds the time and resources for their accomplishment.

Corporate reforms now mean that academics, in addition to their core activities of teaching and research, have to work more closely with business, industry and the professions in an effort to raise revenue for their institutions (Ellingsen, 1999a). Increasingly academics are engaged in money-making tasks not necessarily central to their training, interests or satisfaction. Hence, academics with a strong sense of professional identity lament the decline of scholarship in their institutions and mock “the soul-destroying commercialisation of

[corporate] activities” (Gava, 2001:46). Incongruent role expectations (i.e., between what the university demands and what the academic desires) means many academics do not feel valued members of their universities. As a consequence, many leading academics head overseas for institutions they perceive to value scholarship more highly than they do income generation (Ellingsen, 1999b). Others engage in ‘coping strategies’ (Trowler, 1998:122-126) for dealing with the new corporate work environment such as unofficially ‘working to rule’, avoiding meetings, refusing to get involved in special projects, and withdrawing from coordinative positions. By retreating from the ‘degree factory’, academics leave the field to those managers who enjoy exercising planning, budgeting and control processes of the university system.

## **Discussion**

Faced by uncertainty and conflict in their value systems, many academics have become incapable of envisioning their own future and that of their universities. For many academics in this study, corporate reforms are perceived as threatening. Value conflict statements indicate academics feel traditional academic values are being threatened or compromised by corporate reforms. Associated work stress statements indicate academics do not feel they have the time, or the resources to carry out required job tasks to their preferred standards. In a state of value conflict and stress, academics do not support reforms that base education on the principles of profit and deny the importance of learning, scholarship and creativity.

As collegial relations are strained across university campuses, and commercial activity intensifies, more and more academics are questioning the validity of corporate work practices. Recent events in Australian universities suggest academic freedom will be curtailed when academics criticise decisions made by senior university management (Ellingsen, 1999a; Richards, 1999) or voice their concerns about lower academic standards (Elliott, 2001; Noonan & Contractor, 2001). For example, a Professor at Victoria University of Technology had his e-mail disconnected when he criticised a university decision to take a \$100,000 corporate box at a local football stadium. The Vice-Chancellor informed the professor that use of the university’s e-mail “to harass, intimidate, denigrate or defame any members of the university community, whether staff, student, or member of a university body, such as council, will not be tolerated” (Richards, 1999:7). At Wollongong University an Associate Professor was sacked after he made ‘over-marking’ allegations with respect to honours theses. The Vice-Chancellor said he regretted the sacking but the academic had “knowingly [made] false allegations undermining the essential fabric of the employment relationship” and had therefore endangered the university’s reputation (Lawnham, 2001:5).

To minimise value conflict in academe, university leaders need to adapt corporate principles and practices to the scholarly values of academics and the educational needs of universities (Gungwu, 2001:44). Importantly, leaders need to be seen (in word and deed) to understand the academic value system. All too often university leaders engage in ‘carrot and stick’ leadership techniques based on hierarchical authority and control (Brunetto, 2000:62). This transactional leadership style effectively maintains the status quo by ensuring there is sufficient distance between the academic manager and academic scholar. In effect, academics at lower levels are routinely dissuaded from voicing their concerns or participating in university decision making and hence identify less and less with the university’s values and direction (Winter et al., 2000). Clearly, leadership cannot “function solely as a unilateral or top-down process in the academic context” (Middlehurst, 1993:75).

To gain the trust of academics, leaders need to articulate a 'shared' vision of the future, one that integrates managerial (university) and academic (individual) values and goals and defines, with appropriate indicators, effective performance levels (Kouzes & Posner, 1990). For example, senior university leaders might conduct academic forums and openly discuss and share their core values and beliefs with academic staff (Whiteley, 1995). These 'sensemaking forums' (Weick, 1979) would enable academics to voice personal issues such as changing identities, roles and careers associated with institutional change (Taylor, 2000). Time could be spent on identifying 'what is wrong with the status quo' before leaders invite academics to join any change process. Hence, these forums provide a useful starting point for change, for sharing perspectives and for promoting good will between leaders and academics. Electronic bulletin boards and global e-mails might also be utilised to share core values since they can easily boundary-span levels within the university and hence integrate top and bottom organisation levels.

Heads of departments are placed at a critical point of academic influence. By virtue of their positions they can exert pressure for change on the organisation and its policies as a whole, whilst also influencing the culture of the work units for which they are responsible (Ramsden, 1998:12). Hence, the leadership challenge for heads of departments is to encourage innovation and entrepreneurial activity (managerial values) whilst maintaining the importance of academic autonomy, professionalism and collegial relations (academic values). For example, lecturers might be encouraged to develop innovative teaching materials when funds are devolved to "course-development teams" or to individual staff acting as "lone rangers" (Taylor, 1999:14). Budgetary devolution signals trust in individual lecturers to make appropriate teaching decisions in the best interests of the university. Hence, trust is instrumental in minimising value conflict in academe for it shapes how individual academics interpret the change process. However, study findings suggest innovations in teaching will not occur unless individual academic contributions are recognised and rewarded. More informal feedback on job performance would help build trust between academics and supervisors and allow academics to change their work performance to achieve desired outcomes. As noted by the report of the Dearing Committee in the U.K. (NCIHE, 1997:para.14.12), more flexible promotion criteria is needed in higher education to reflect the wide range of roles and tasks academics are required to undertake in their institutions. That is, promotion decisions need to be based on *actual* work activities, not an idealised 'checklist' of what academics *should* do to be effective at work.

To integrate academic values and ensure academics feel part of the change process, appropriate structural mechanisms need to be put in place. A key strategy here is the building of participation in the change program since participation tends to reduce resistance, build ownership of the change, and motivate people to make the change work (Belasco, 1990). Parallel learning structures are appropriate vehicles for change in universities where entrenched hierarchy and bureaucratic systems inhibit learning, innovation and change (Bushe & Shani, 1991; Valentine, 1997). Consisting of a steering committee comprising senior managers and academics from all levels and disciplines, participants could focus on ways to reduce hierarchy, encourage learning and innovation, and improve recognition and rewards practices in universities. A key function of each working group would be to study what changes are needed to existing work designs (based on data collection), make recommendations for improvement, and monitor the change efforts.

Corporate reforms to Australian universities present challenges to both managers and academics. A recurrent managerial challenge will be how to achieve more administrative

efficiency in academic work environments characterised by value conflict and stress. Gaining the support of 'the managed' will not be an easy task when many academics feel personally threatened by the tenets and practices of managerialism. Academics experiencing value conflict will also need to think very carefully about the relationship they want with their university, and how that relationship might be achieved in the future. Without some individual 'acceptance' of the validity of corporate work arrangements, academic staff will continue to experience value conflict and suffer a decline in their quality of work life.

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