

What do Australian Academics think of Professional staff and what should we do about it?

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The literature: five themes

1: The Professional Other

2: Managerialism

3: An Expensive Bureaucracy

4: Complementary Agendas & symbiosis

5: The Third Space and Beyond

1: The Professional Other

“...the propensity for general staff to be ignored is high.”

(Dobson, 2000, p. 203)

This construction of administrative workers—relatively powerless women doing menial tasks—is a rather old-fashioned one. It may have had its place in the 1970s but seems anachronistic today. Administrative roles are, on the whole, more complex, more specialised, more skilled and more responsive to the external environment than these constructions of administrators. (Szekeress, 2004, p. 17)

2: Managerialism

“[There is a] formidable range of routine regulatory practices introduced and overseen by administrative gurus.” (Hil, 2012, p. 41).

“...the modern university is usually a large complex organisation. As such, it needs to be "managed". Thus, tension between collegial and managerial styles is bound to be chronic.”

(Karmel, 1990 p. 332)

3: An Expensive Bureaucracy

“To support a corporate culture, university bureaucracies have become gigantic. Campuses are filled with layer upon layer of administrators.”

(Russell, 2004).

“If spending on the costs of employing non-academics could be reduced by 50% ... universities could employ additional academic staff. A further boost to productivity could be expected as old and new staff benefit from a decrease in the amount of time they must dedicate to bureaucratic transactions.”

(Graves, Barnett, & Clarke, 2013).

4: Complementary Agendas & Symbiosis

“Multiple non-academic tasks are increasingly being performed by well-paid experts and specialists, rather than amateurs recruited from among former or current academics; these units include especially finances, student affairs, alumni and fundraising affairs.”

(Kweik, 2008, p. 73)

5: The Third Space

‘...[There’s an] emergence of [a] ‘third space’ between the activities of professional and academic staff, creating new understandings in relation to universities as organisations. These understandings have implications for the concepts of ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ in universities’ (Whitchurch et al, 2009).

Methodology

- Survey instrument and compilation of results
- Interviews – illustrative responses transcribed into analytical framework table
- Discussion and analysis dovetails in many directions

Preliminary Findings

- 34 survey responses
- Theme 4 emerged as the one with the highest level of agreement.
- Significant differences between attitudes to staff at the local vs central level.

Survey highlights

COMPLEMENTARY AGENDAS & SYMBIOSIS	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Professional staff in my department show an understanding of academic workloads, pressures and priorities	94%	0%	6%
Professional staff in central units show an understanding of academic workloads, pressures and priorities	35%	38%	27%
Local professional staff are able to make valuable contributions to the management of people and resources	91%	0%	9%
Central professional staff are able to make valuable contributions to the management of people and resources	38%	38%	24%
My overall workload is lower because of professional staff in my department	82%	9%	9%
My overall workload is lower because of central professional staff	44%	24%	32%

Survey highlights

MANAGERIALISM	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Professional staff in my department increase the amount of day-to-day red tape faced by academic staff	6%	21%	73%
Professional staff in central units increase the amount of day-to-day red tape faced by academic staff	41%	38%	21%
Professional staff in my department represent a culture of “managerialism” that is incompatible with university culture	12%	0%	88%
Professional staff in central units represent a culture of “managerialism” that is incompatible with university culture	41%	35%	24%

So What?

Institutions need to harness
the complementary skills
and knowledge of
professional staff

So How?

Three Resolutions

- Be known
- Be bold
- Be cooperative

“To the best of my ability I will build my enterprise’s capacity to support academic projects by strengthening its resources, relationships and reputation”

Sharrock (2010)

Symbiosis



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Questions?

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