Introduction

Managing academics and their work is contested territory. Indeed, some readers may feel the word managing to be a contradiction in terms as academics, perhaps by definition, have the professional skills and expertise to manage their own work. To echo an over-used term, it’s pointless trying to manage cats (Deem, 2010). The intent of this text is not to resolve the inherent tensions of managers and academics competing to shape and control key aspects of academic work and scholarship. Nor does it attempt to prescribe one best theory or approach for managing academics across all types of organisation. Instead, the overall rationale is to offer readers contrasting perspectives of managing others in order to provoke alternative interpretations of academic work, scholarship and the different kinds of working relationships that can ensue in higher education institutions (HEI).

Managing Academics focuses on the identity tensions and challenges arising within UK and Australian public universities as they attempt to combine and sustain competing managerial and professional values (Henkel, 2012; Winter and O’Donohue, 2012). A deliberate attempt is made to extend discussion of the value-laden conditions that may enable (and constrain) universities, managers and academic staff from positioning higher education in terms of the economic and social role that it can fulfil (McArthur, 2011).

Managing Academics takes an analytical-empirical rather than a reflexive-popular approach to discussion. A deliberate attempt is made to extend current thinking of academic management by integrating studies of academic identity, professionalism and quality of worklife (QWL) in higher education (academic values) with authority, commitment and client-community service concepts developed within the disciplines of sociology, psychology and management (management values). Throughout the text, issues of purpose and identity resonate to draw attention to how academic-managers may shape work around different values and judgements of what constitutes ‘efficient’, ‘engaging’ and ‘legitimate’ work and scholarship.

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PERSPECTIVE TAKING

The text offers a choice of perspectives for managing academics. A choice of perspectives rests on the proposition that changing the way academic work is perceived and managed will pay dividends in terms of improving the motivation of academics and the performance of the institution as a whole. For instance, seeing connections between the perceived work environment and the overall QWL and motivation of academics represents one approach to managing academics in HEI (Johnsrud, 2002). Other perspectives are underpinned by different values, organising logics and engagement conditions that may suit more your own role position, scholarship interests and experiences in higher education.

Ideally, the perspectives presented here will challenge the notion managing academics is a unitary, value-free process and raise awareness of managing as a social process whereby personal values and identity questions are treated as issues of importance to the manager and managed in HEI (Winter, 2009). To help provoke social conceptions of managing and scholarship in the corporate university (Rolfe, 2013), a multiple perspectives model anchored in certain economic, professional, and social values and identity positions is proposed (see Chapter 3).

The multiple perspectives model is designed to contrast three broad social perspectives of managing others (that is, professionalism, quality of worklife, prosocial identity) with a narrower and dominant economic perspective of managerialism in HEI (Teelken, 2012). The intention of this contrast is twofold. First, is to make the familiar unitary view of managing others strange so that academic-managers will question its core ethos and values, purpose and limitations. Second, is to present pluralist perspectives of managing rooted in broader professional and socially-ethical values so that academic-managers can see how these different beliefs may possibly lead to stronger “relationship bonds” (Klein, Molloy and Brinsfield, 2012) with others in the academic department and more “scholarship that matters” (Hughes et al., 2011) outside the department and university.

Another key reason for presenting a choice of perspectives is to try and help academic-managers with strong technical skills develop a more nuanced and “complicated understanding” of the process of managing other academics (Bartunek, Gordon and Weathersby, 1983, p. 273). Such an understanding recognises that many academic-managers are propelled into supervisory positions without receiving much in the way of human relations training (Hancock, 2007; Knight and Trowler, 2001).
A complicated understanding also recognises the inherent difficulties academic-managers face when promoting modernising corporate cultures whilst simultaneously attempting to sustain traditional academic cultures (Henkel, 2012). Walking this tightrope in the enterprise university may be less stressful an activity when academic-managers articulate different understandings of academic work, rather than ‘close-down’ all conversation to some unitary target or corporate metric (Whitchurch and Gordon, 2010). This is not to say that market-based logic or managerial criteria does not have a place in managing academics. Higher education and its management clearly have facets of a business and/or entrepreneurial enterprise (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2009; Whitchurch, 2010). But this does not imply managerialism should be the sole basis for managing academics or for managing the institution for that matter.

OUTLINE

Managing Academics is organised into three parts. Part I aims to provoke different conceptions of managing academics and their work in the context of corporate reforms to HEI. Chapter 1 portrays managing as a sensemaking process and assumes academic-managers will exercise some degree of choice in choosing perspectives of managing that best fit their social worlds and their own personal beliefs, values and goal intentions. That is, it is assumed managers are somewhat willing to engage in a sensemaking process to see how their thinking may be associated with certain working relationships and scholarship outcomes within their HEI and wider communities.

Chapter 2 presents a three-level change model to explicate the structural and value-based conditions underpinning academic work and identity in HEI. The model highlights how corporate reforms in higher education (national-sector level) have fundamentally reshaped the nature of the public university (organisational level) and the psychological meaning academics attach to their work roles and identities (individual level). Key studies of academic work and identity are discussed including the different identity-related responses of academics as they adjust (or not) to a more managerialist working environment.

Chapter 3 presents an integrating framework for managing academics: the multiple perspectives model. Key perspectives are organised on a continuum from the narrow-economic (managerial authority) to the broader community-social (prosocial identity). Each perspective is contrasted in terms of its key purpose and focus, defining features and core
values and ethos to illustrate how different conceptions of managing may be associated with different types of social relationships and scholarship outcomes.

In Part II, key perspectives of managing academics are discussed and critiqued: managerialism (Chapter 4), professionalism (Chapter 5), quality of worklife (Chapter 6) and prosocial identity (Chapter 7). For each of the perspectives, relevant studies are drawn upon to shed light on the motives, values and expectations of managers, academics, students and other stakeholders as they respond to key challenges, problems and opportunities in their working environments.

In Part III, attention turns to some of the process issues underlying perspective taking. Chapter 8 sets the scene by defining some of the hybrid challenges academic-managers and HEI face as they respond to current pressures to be more efficient and business-like. Possible hybrid work practices for enabling competing perspectives of scholarship presented in earlier chapters to be combined and enacted in HEI are also discussed.

Chapter 9 introduces a model for perceiving and enacting scholarship differently in HEI. A key focus of the scholarship model is on identifying personal conditions (that is, cognitive complexity, cognitive empathy, prosocial value orientation, work engagement) and work environment conditions (that is, flexible work role descriptions, support for autonomy, relational job design, employee voice opportunities) for enabling different types of scholarship outcomes to be valued in HEI. Finally, the text concludes by considering some key process and identity issues for enabling (and constraining) perspective taking in HEI.