

Chapter 18

Leadership and Followership in Post-1992 University Business Schools in England

Thomas Charles Bisschoff
University of Birmingham, UK

Michael Lewis Nieto
Regent's University London, UK

ABSTRACT

The research reflects on how academics interact as leaders and followers in Post-1992 University Business Schools. The study was cognisant of the tensions experienced by knowledge workers, such as academics, whereby a person may have leadership responsibilities, whilst working within as a collegiate environment. The research explores leadership through qualitative methodology and constructivist discourse within three cases studies. The selection of case studies included two business schools which had experienced numerous restructures and one where the management team was more stable. The key outcomes of the research indicate that the respondents are dissatisfied by their leaders and reported an absence of consultation as well as almost yearly disruptive restructuring. Consequently, the research reported minimal followership or distributed leadership. Instead, disengagement was reported by academics in both management and non-management posts. In two of the business schools, successive sets of new externally hired management teams had imposed reorganisations and redundancies. Consequently, academics expressed disengagement and reported systemic failures to develop and promote internal candidates to senior management and departmental leadership posts.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to evaluate what leadership and followership means in a contemporary English Post-1992 University Business School context. The research thereby considered leadership and followership, at a time when some of the post 1992 business schools are addressing challenging changes in their organisational environment, which surfaced interesting questions as to what it means to be a

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leader or follower in higher education context (Bisschoff & Watts 2013; Bolden *et al* 2014; Chreim, 2014; Mabey & Morrell 2011; Nieto, 2014). For example, the respondents' reported perception was that many of them were facing complex situations, unknown and challenging problems, such as those described by Grint (2008, p16) as a '*wicked situation*'. However, the respondents reported that the functionalist management they were working within was unsuited to the new organisational leadership requirements (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2003). Accordingly, the respondents' perceptions of leadership and followership in their workplaces contributed a rich source of new material on leadership and followership within contemporary knowledge worker environments.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POST 1992 UNIVERSITIES

The post 1992 universities came into being as a result of a government policy to expand higher education. Accordingly, the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 almost doubled the number of universities to eighty-four. The Education Reform Act of 1988 abolished the University Grants Committee (UGC). According to Anderson in Withers (2009) the changes introduced by both the 1988 Act and the White Paper of 1986, encouraged more managerial control into the newly formed universities.

In 2015, the post 1992 universities are part of a diverse range of institutions engaged in higher education provision; a list of the post 1992 universities is provided in appendix 1. By way of contextualising the growth of university providers, in the nineteenth century England had just two universities, until the creation of the university of London, in 1886. The next set of universities to be formed was referred to as the Red brick universities because of their city locations. The red brick universities came into being during the 1900s, the first of which was the University of Birmingham. It then took several more decades before the next group, which were referred to as the plate glass universities, were established in the 1960s (Robbins Report 1963). The post 1992 universities arrived in the 1990s followed by another smaller group of new universities in the early 2000s (Marginson, 2006).

Most recently, the new additions to the university sector have come from the private sector, namely BPP and Regent's University London in 2013. These new entrants tend, on balance, to be more teaching orientated, although they do engage in organisational research studies and have active connections with the business sector and professional chartered bodies. However, they are different from the state funded universities in that they depend directly on student fees and commercial income instead of state funding. Conversely, the post 1992 universities are dependent upon state funding and for the most part, have fewer financial contributions from research than the older HE institutions (Dearing Report, 1997; Hefce Report 2014; Hefce Report 2014; Morgan 2015; Morgan & Newman, 2010; Newman 2010; Shepherd 2010).

According to the research data gathered for the Hefce Report (2014), the changes which may influence student participation levels, such as the increase in tuition fees, have had impacted variably on different segments of the sector.

'Declines of more than 10 per cent were seen at 28 higher education institutions and 17 further education colleges. The majority of the higher education institutions experiencing these levels of decline were ones where entrants had low or medium average tariff scores. The overall increase in further education colleges reflects broader shifts away from provision franchised from HEIs, with colleges now offering more higher education directly.' Hefce Report (2014 pp. 90-121. (Source: Analysis of the HESA standard registration population at English HEIs, 2005-06 to 2012-13).

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