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Towards post-managerialism in higher education: The case study of management change at the University of The Witwatersrand 1999-2004

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

My interest in management change in universities grew out of my experience as a student activist and my frustration with the slow pace of change. From my early days in high school during the turmoil of the 1980s, politics and struggle consumed my being and followed me throughout my university career. At the University of Cape Town I was involved in the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO) during the early 1990s and later, after having moved on to the University of the Western Cape (UWC), I became a member of two consecutive Student Representative Councils (SRCs). The 1990s was a time of heightened expectations nationally and across all social fronts. Within higher education, students were excited and enthused by the possibility that higher education would be transformed through greater levels of representation, and power would be tilted in favour of the interests of the poor. These possibilities breathed new life into mass involvement; many layers of students were involved in SRC activities at UWC, which gave the SRC a great deal of confidence that transformation was possible. As the SRC, we diligently fought to establish the Broad Transformation Forum (BTF), stave off any possibility of upfront payments and secured access to education of non-fee paying students. This led to escalating institutional debts. It felt to us as if student power would be a lived reality, with UWC as a microcosm of developments nationally. However, even as we managed to secure greater representation in, for example, statutory bodies and spearhead the establishment of the BTF, the impact of sliding government commitment to subsidising higher education could not be averted. Despite our numerous efforts, many sleepless nights and active incitement, the struggle for transformation of institutions of the left could not be sustained. By the late 1990s as financial pressure upon students to pay their way grew, the drive by institutions to advertise grew alongside this. By this stage I was no longer a student but now as a community activist, I noticed that through radio, television and even at movie theatres, universities were advertising themselves. Change was taking place but in a way that was nothing like I as a student activist had anticipated. It

was almost with a sense of despair, yet great interest in these new developments (which I glibly thought of as marketisation), that I turned to understanding the 'other side': what those in power did, how they managed, despite the efforts of mass organisations, to retain power.

1.2 Focus of the Study

This study is concerned with the changing nature of management at universities in the context of restructuring, through an investigation of a single case, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). I consider managerial change pre and post the 1999 restructuring with respect to the organisational design, levels of management and academic work.

1.3 The Research Questions

The research question that guides this study is: ***Why and how has a particular form of management emerged at Wits?***

In exploring this, the study considers a number of sub-questions. Firstly, *What **debates and theories** have influenced the university management's practice with respect to restructuring?* Studies such as the work of Birnbaum (2000) that focus on changes in university management tend to suggest that debates and theories that originate from the private sector are adopted by higher education institutions.[1]

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[1] Birnbaum, R. (2000). The Life Cycle of Academic Management Fads. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(1), 1-16; Birnbaum, R. (2000). *Management Fads in Higher Education: Where They Come From, What They Do, Why They Fail*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

In exploring management change at Wits, understanding the debates and theories informing this change points to the specific concepts and ideas employed to initiate restructuring.

Secondly, *What has been the **nature of restructuring** at Wits?* Clarke and Newman (1997) make a distinction between a hard and a soft approach to restructuring, [2] suggesting that the nature of restructuring may differ, depending on what is being restructured and who the parties involved in the restructuring process, are. Given this apparent varied nature of restructuring, the study explores how restructuring differs depending on what is being restructured. With reference to this case variations relating to support services and academic services will be considered.

Thirdly, ***Why** was the university restructured?* This question explores the rationale for restructuring. It is commonly pointed out in the literature, as discussed in Chapter Two, that higher education institutions tend to restructure for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness. This study explores what the specific reasons were in context and the meanings attached to these commonly articulated notions.

Fourthly, *What was the **nature of management** before, during and after restructuring at Wits?* As suggested by the notion 'restructuring', changes are introduced to the institutional structures, which in turn may affect the nature of management. This question allows a closer appreciation of these specific changes in comparative perspective before and after the restructuring process.

1.4 Theoretical Stance Adopted in the Study

A review of the literature reveals that managerial change in universities has been considered largely within the framework of managerialism and, as a consequence,

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[2] Clarke, J. & Newman, J. (1997). *The Managerial State.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd. p. 72.

has been conceived similarly to changes in the public sector as corporate managerialism. Contrary to this approach, the study draws not only upon this changing mode of management but re-introduces the notion of 'collegiality' theoretically as a way to gain a closer approximation of the peculiar nature of universities. The theoretical argument conveyed in this thesis is that, in introducing a private sector type management style into a traditional university context which does not share the ethos nor organisational structure of private sector organisations, the nature of managerialism is altered, but so too is the nature of collegiality. As the study is concerned with notions of power and organisational change, the work of Foucault on power[3] and organisational theorists such as Hogget[4] are influential in this thesis.

1.5 Aims of the Thesis

The aims of the thesis are:

1. To examine the changing nature of management in universities and thereby to shed light on how university management is changing, specifically in South Africa.
2. To contribute to institutional critical reflections, reviews or evaluations as to what has been implemented to date, within the logic of restructuring.
3. To contribute to the literature by offering a different way of understanding the nature of managerial change in a specific institutional context.
4. To offer further insights, experiences and insider perspectives on managerial change through an investigation of a single case study.

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[3] Faubion, J.D. (2002). *Michel Foucault power essential works of Foucault 1954-1984* Volume 3. England: Penguin Books.

[4] Hoggett, P. (1996). New modes of control in the public service. *Public Administration*, 94, 16-17.

1.6 Defining 'Collegiality', 'Managerialism', 'Contrived Collegial Managerialism'and 'Restructuring'

1.6.1 Collegiality

'Collegiality' in this study refers to the organisational design, positions and processes through which academic leadership is offered and intellectual spaces and agendas flourish. Collegiality therefore does not only refer to the autonomy of academics as they exercise their expertise, but also to the conditions required to sustain and grow in their special positions.

1.6.2 Managerialism

'Managerialism' refers to the tendency to appropriate private or corporate sector processes, practices and organisational forms and implement them in public sector type organisations such as universities. Managerialism translates into the dominance in power and authority of managers over academics. It is a top-down style of management that privileges economic rationalism above all other concerns, including academic leadership.

1.6.3 Contrived Collegial Managerialism

'Contrived collegial managerialism' refers to the consequences of the imposition of managerialism upon collaborative cultures and practices. Instead of encouraging initiative and creativity in unpredictable spaces for intellectual growth, the space for informal engagement and voluntary association, the provision of academic leadership to foster these collaborative initiatives, 'contrived collegial managerialism' marks the dominance of managerial prerogative over consensus decision making within the collegium, the transformation of previous academic leaders into managerial conduits and the transformation of academic work into predictable and measurable outcomes.

1.6.4 Restructuring

'Restructuring' has been drawn from economics and refers to different kinds of reform within education. Duan (1997) provides a useful discussion of three different meanings of 'restructuring': (i) changes in the management of educational resources and processes; (ii) prioritising funding allocations in specific areas in the educational system, for example primary education above higher education; and (iii) equity driven reforms which involve the allocation of resources towards historically disadvantaged groups.[5] In this study when discussing restructuring, the focus is on the changing nature of the organisational form and its management.

1.7 The Problem Statement

In my master's thesis I argued that conceptions around transformation forums reveal different conceptions of transformation. The three conceptions of Transformation Forums were advisory, revolutionary and transitionary.

> Transformation Forums that are advisory give advice to the existing structures of authority, while revolutionary forums strive to replace the apartheid structures within institutions with structures that are more representative and able to meet the needs of the most marginalised sectors within society. The Transformation Forums that are transitionary facilitate the transition from the existing apartheid structures to new institutions.[6]

Transformation was therefore understood as the different ways in which marginalised stakeholders could impact upon institutional life. Alongside this, statutory governing bodies such as councils and senates were altered to be more representative of constituencies. The expectation of transformation was that, with

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[5] Duan, H. (1997). National forces, globalisation and educational restructuring: some European response patterns. *Compare*, 27(1), 18-19.

[6] Johnson, B.J. (1997). *Governance Transformation in South African Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of the Broad Transformation Forum at the University of the Western Cape (UWC)*. Unpublished master's research report, Cape Town, University of the Western Cape. p. 25.

greater representation and stakeholder involvement, there would be greater influence and power by marginalised stakeholders over the orientation of the institution. Contrary to expectations, this has not been so. In fact, between 2002 and 2003, an amendment by Act (63) of 2002 of the Higher Education Act (101) of 1997[7] stated that 'councils of public higher education institutions must consist of no more than 30 members'. Since then, Wits has reduced its number from 45 to 29 and has retained the 60:40 ratio in favour of external stakeholder representation.[8] While number is not necessarily the issue, structures tend to become smaller, or in the language of 'economic rationality' streamlined. *Why is this so?* In this thesis I argue that the answer lies in power shifting away from statutory bodies such as senate and council to the domination of management through organisational arrangements and processes associated with the new mode of management and control. Therefore instead of transformation from below we have witnessed transformation from above.

1.8 The Significance of the Study

Widespread changes are evident in the South African higher education system and especially since 1994. These changes range from concerns with the new landscape of higher education, institutional cultures as a consequence of mergers and the new dispensation, funding and government subsidy changes, the marketing of higher education, changing modes of learning, issues of equity and changing patterns of governance and management from national to institutional contexts. All these changes are relatively recent and current.

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7 Higher Education Act 101 (1997). Pretoria: Department of Education.

8 University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, S2003/904, University Archives, Senate House, p. 1.

This study contributes to the general literature in the field of higher education through focusing on one aspect of these changes, management change.

There are very few studies in the South African context that set out to investigate the changing nature of management in universities. Currently there is the work undertaken by Cloete and Kulati.[9] This study is the only other study and is unique as it is the only South African study that focuses upon the changing nature of management in a single institution.

This study contributes to the theoretical debates pertaining to how best to understand the changing nature of management in universities, by reflecting not only upon managerial changes but also on changes in the practice of collaborative or collegial relations. The study moves beyond an 'essentialist reductionist' approach to a more nuanced appreciation of managerial change in universities. This has been achieved through the concept 'contrived collegial managerialism'.

1.9 Thesis Statement

The thesis explores the changing nature of management in the context of the 1999 restructuring exercise at Wits. It starts by exploring the following aspects: (i) the internal and external determinants of the Wits restructuring agenda; (ii) the discourses underpinning the restructuring process; (iii) the particular mode of restructuring; and (iv) the emerging organisational design. It explains how the interplay of these four dimensions has given rise to new forms of management practice evident in the different levels of senior management, the creation of the Senior Executive Team (SET), the changing roles and responsibilities of the deanship and the creation of a new layer of managers, referred to as heads of schools. It argues that these changes are embedded within a 'flawed post-

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[9] Cloete, N. & Kulati, T. (2003). Managerialism within a Framework of Cooperative Governance? In A. Amaral, et al. (Eds.), *The Higher Education Managerial Revolution?* Higher Education Dynamics: 3. Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht. p. 229-250.

bureaucratic' organisational form, which combines features of bureaucratic organisation with features of the post-bureaucratic organisational form.

Similar processes elsewhere have been conceptualised as 'corporate managerialism'. This thesis argues that, taking into account the specific historical peculiarities of Wits, the emerging modes of management practice can better be conceptualised as part of a shift towards a period of post-managerialism, specifically described in this case as 'contrived collegial managerialism', as both managerialism and collegiality are transformed in the university context. This is discussed with reference to internal and external determinants of the Wits restructuring agenda, the adoption of Atkinson's[10] distinction between core and non-core functions in organisational change and the privileging of structural arrangements, indicating emphasis on efficiency and performativity which gave prominence to management over other stakeholders within the institution. The thesis brings new theoretical insights to the debate on managerial practices within institutions of higher learning.

1.10 Structure of Thesis and Chapter Outlines

The next chapter, **Chapter 2: Literature review,** deals with recent changes in higher education management, and asks why new trends and patterns in the management of the higher education sector and universities emerge. It discusses the following issues: (i) the notion of 'managerialism' and its various conceptual underpinnings; (ii) the rationale for the changing management practices in higher education institutions; and (iii) the various modes of management in higher education institutions. It is argued in this chapter that most of the literature on

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[10] Atkinson, J. (1986). Manpower Strategies for Flexible Organisations, *Personnel Management*, Aug.; Also cited in Thompson, P. & McHugh, D. (1995).*Work Organisations A Critical Introduction*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd. p.173 – 174.

current trends in university management suffers from an essentialist reductionism which conceptualises emerging trends in university management as 'managerialism' without paying attention to the different and complex forms these assume in different contexts. This universalising approach fails to account for the peculiarities of higher education institutions in these contexts. The chapter points to the need for reframing these conceptualisations by looking more closely at the specificity of the empirical data. I therefore turn to a discussion on collegiality and conclude with a conceptual framework that guided the study.

Chapter 3: Research methodology. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research methodology of the thesis: (i) the research design; (ii) the research methods; (iii) the method of analysis; and (iv) a reflection upon the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodology. Through a detailed narrative of the research process and my own experiences in this process, the chapter offers important insights into the complexities and sensitivities of research into issues related to power and power relations.

Chapter 4: The institutional context of restructuring at Wits: internal and external determinants. This chapter explores the institutional context that influenced the adoption of the 1999 restructuring exercise at Wits. In doing so it explores three periods: Wits Opposition to the Apartheid State, 1984 to 1994, The Period of Crisis Management, 1994 to 1997 and The Period of Visionary Management, 1997 to 1999. The questions addressed with reference to each period are: What is the relationship between the institution and the state? What is the nature of the relationship between internal constituencies? How did the management respond to environmental changes? It is argued in this chapter that the challenges and processes experienced during these three periods culminated in a crystallisation of an important set of beliefs and norms, entrenched in the Wits institutional culture, which mediated institutional restructuring and consequently a new mode of management at Wits.

Chapter 5: State, policy and institutional response. This chapter focuses on national pressures as they relate to the changing state-institutional relations, higher education policy and new modes of government control or steering in higher

education. The chapter posits the following claims: (i) In post apartheid South Africa the relations between state and higher education changed from state control to state supervision which emphasised steering mechanisms with conditional interference; (ii) while this has not significantly altered the degree of autonomy that institutions like Wits enjoyed under apartheid, it has, however, posed new pressures and uncertainties that have some bearing on Wits' institutional responses; and (iii) Wits' responses reflected the dilemma between its commitment to preserving its institutional legacy and the need to acknowledge the demands placed upon it by the state.

Chapter 6: The 1999 restructuring exercise: a new organisational design. This chapter focuses on what happened during the 1999 restructuring exercise coordinated by a change management team known as Wits 2001, which entailed the reconfiguration of support services and academic entities. The underpinning discourse,[11] mode of restructuring and the new organisational design will be discussed. The search for a new institutional identity entailed a shift away from the complex transformation discourses evident during the 1990s and discussed in Chapter 4, to the pragmatic discourse of restructuring or organising the institution differently[12] determined by competitive concerns. This is discussed with reference to three key questions: What was the restructuring agenda? What did the process of restructuring entail? What implications did it have for the new organisational arrangements and practice? It is argued in this chapter that, through interplay of various aspects of the institutional restructuring exercise addressed in these questions, a suitable organisational design in line with a new institutional identity underpinned by economic rationality, efficiency, performance and market relevance emerged. Through this, the seeds for the emergence of a new mode of management distinct from the institution's legacy were sown. Contrary to the rhetoric that institutional costs would be saved, institutional costs had to be

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[11] Here the notion 'discourse' refers to the underpinning connotations or meanings of words and interpretations. It also includes a way of being or behaviour.

[12] This definition was drawn from the *South African Concise Oxford Dictionary*. (2002). Cape Town: O.U.P. p.997.

increased to meet the costs of repositioning the institution towards market oriented and income generation strategies that have resulted in commodification[13] trends in teaching and research.

Chapter 7: The case of the Senior Executive Team. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the establishment of a new management team at the most senior level of the university referred to as the Senior Executive Team (SET) for management practice. The issues discussed are: How has SET affected the management practice between the senior university management and the traditional academic statutory bodies of the university such as the senate? In what ways has the establishment of SET affected relations between deans and the faculty? Indeed, in what ways has SET, set and consolidated a new management agenda within the university? The argument pursued in this chapter is that, through centralising power in SET contrary to the discourse of devolution, a new mode of management was required at Wits, which recentralised power at the top while deconcentrating operational functions.

Chapter 8: The case of the new deanship. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the new roles and responsibilities of the deanship, brought about by the new organisational design, for management practice. The issues discussed here are: How have the changed role and responsibilities of deans affected their management practice? What emerging patterns or features can be identified that characterise executive deanship at Wits? In which ways has their management practice been affected in relation to the vice-chancellor and the newly created position of head of school and the changed nature of the role of the dean? The argument pursued in this chapter is that, through changing the nature of the position of deanship from that of academic leadership to increasingly managerial and corporatised, a new mode of management emerged, which under

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[13] Here I refer to 'partial' commodification as opposed to 'wholesale' commodification as all courses, degrees and programs are not designed for buying and selling on the higher education market. The University of Pretoria and the University of Johannesburg are examples of institutions at which more widespread commodification is evident.

Wits' specific conditions, gives substance to the qualifier "executive" in executive deanship.

Chapter 9: Filtering down the managerial agenda through heads of schools. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the creation of the new position 'head of school' and its accompanying roles and responsibilities for management practice. The issues discussed here are: How has the creation of the new positions of head of school affected management practice? What is the relation of head of school to deans and faculty? What are the emerging trends and features that can be identified with the position of head of school? The argument pursued in this chapter is that, through creating the position of head of school as a conduit through which senior managers are able to exert managerial pressure upon staff, a new mode of management is being entrenched at the faculty level, with considerable implications for academic practice.

Chapter 10: Managerial practice and academic work. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the new organisational design for management practice and academic work. In doing so, four key questions are posed: (i) How does management go about making decisions? (ii) How does management implement decisions? (iii) How does management influence decision making? and (iv) What have been the implications of the changes in managerial practice for academic work? This is to highlight shifts in the mode and style of management and the implications for the institutional mission. It is argued in this chapter, through drawing upon Chapters 6, 7 and 8, that both managerial practices and academic work have been transformed as a consequence of institutional restructuring.

Chapter 11: A new mode of management, 'Contrived Collegial Managerialism'. The aim of this chapter is to emphasise the key features of the new mode of management at Wits. The chapter focuses on how best the new emerging mode and style of management can be conceptualised at Wits. The argument pursued in this chapter is that the dominance of managerialism from above, evident in the discourse, mode and organisational design of restructuring, has significantly constrained spontaneity, initiative and voluntary interaction

associated with collegial practices from below. Only through developing dialogue and conversation between these two tendencies may managerial practices that take into account both external pressures and internal interests emerge.