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EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC MANAGERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Richard David Henson

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management (in the Field of Public and Development Management)

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ABSTRACT

In a rapidly changing higher education environment the role of the academic manager, bridging the academic worlds of teaching and research and the administrative worlds of resource allocation, coordination and control, is seen as critical in ensuring that the institutions they work for achieve their goals. This research study focuses on the world of the Academic Manager, as experienced and perceived within their individual contexts, by a selected number of academic managers working at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2012. Through in depth interviews, the research explores how academic managers are adapting to the changing environment in which they work, the coping strategies they have adopted, the support available to them and the skill sets required.

DECLARATION

I declare that this report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Management) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

_____

Richard David Henson

27 March 2013

DEDICATION

To my wife Vernie, my fellow student, confidant and soul mate, for your unfailing support and belief that I would eventually complete this.

Now it is your turn – go girl!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisor, Lynn Hewlett, for her guidance throughout the research process, to those who gave me expert guidance at various stages, who are acknowledged in the text, and finally to my employer at the time, loveLife, specifically my boss, Linda Kumbemba, for allowing me the necessary time off when needed!

ABBREVIATIONS, ACCRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

ALTSA	Administrative, Library and Technical Staff Association
ASAWU	Academic Staff Association of Wits University
CCMA	Council for Mediation and Arbitration
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GERD	Gross Expenditure on Research and Development
HDI	Historically Disadvantaged Institution
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HR	The Human Resources function
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union
SARUA	The Southern African Regional Universities Association
Wits University (Wits)	The University of the Witwatersrand

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In the age of 'globalisation', rapid advances in information and communication technology, coupled with the new economic/political world order that emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War, have led to the rapid shrinking of old conceptions of time and distance and the opening up of new international markets in goods and services. The age of the truly international university has arrived, e-learning has become a reality, and almost everywhere the established universities have found themselves facing new forms of competition for students, funding and research opportunities. (see for example Ntshoe (2008) and Bundy (2005)).

At the same time new forms of public administration, emphasizing concepts and models developed in the world of enterprise and business, have gained wide international acceptance across governments of differing political persuasions. As governments across the globe have implemented fiscal austerity measures following the global economic crisis of 2008, 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' have increasingly become bywords in public institutions. Performance management, quality control systems, strategic planning and corporate style 'command and control' structures have been introduced into spaces that were formerly the exclusive terrain of 'bureaucratic' civil servants or 'collegial' academics (see for example Kolsaker (2008) Gleeson and Knights (2008) Johnson and Cross (2004)).

In the developed world this has had a huge impact not only at the institutional level but also at the individual level. This applies particularly to the so-called 'Academic Manager', the Dean or Head of School, entrusted with the administration of the key academic units within institutions, who has had to adapt in the face of rapid changes in the environments in which he/she operates (see for example de Boer and Goedegebuure (2009)). Such adaptations have included the need to adopt a different management culture, allocate their time differently between competing interests and acquire an array of new skills. Whilst some have adapted, others have resisted and many can be assumed to have simply 'perished'.

To what extent have these global forces which, it is claimed, have fundamentally changed higher education in the developed countries, had an influence on the way universities are currently run in South Africa?

International isolation during the apartheid years delayed the arrival of new forms of public management in South Africa but, since 1994, more managerial forms of governance have been adopted by many of the 23 public universities in the country as

> *one campus after another, institutional innovations closely replicated models designed in the USA, UK and Australasia*. (Bundy (2005) p. 90)

The legacy of the previous apartheid regime, where provision of higher education resources was inequitably skewed on racial lines, left in its wake justifiable demands for greater access, equity and social redress.

Understandably, in the immediate post 1994 period, government prioritized the racial transformation of the higher education system. Successive governments have, however, increasingly had to juggle this commitment with expectations that higher education should contribute significantly to economic development, through the production of increasing numbers of highly qualified graduates, and to try and do this within fiscal constraints that have seen public funding drop significantly in percentage terms as a source of income for most South African universities. These tensions are often characterised as the tension between "equity and development" and "equity and efficiency" (Cloete and Moja (2005)).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Higher education institutions in South Africa are under pressure. Huge increases in the demand for places, coupled with demands for equity and social redress are being placed on institutions which themselves are sometimes inadequately resourced in terms of necessary infrastructure, equipment and qualified staff. At the same time, far greater demands than ever before are being placed on institutions for transparency and accountability from an increasingly diverse range of different stakeholders. This is occurring in an environment where state funding, as a percentage of the total income received by universities, is declining and universities are expected to diversify their funding bases and do 'more with less'.

The research speculated that these problems would be particularly acute for managers of the core academic units (Heads of School and Deans), who are primarily accountable for delivery in the key areas of teaching and research. A review of the literature revealed that they were likely to find themselves caught between the competing expectations of a number of different stakeholders, including senior management, their fellow academics, students, donors, government officials and other role players.

There is a great deal of literature, mainly emanating from the developed nations, on the changing nature of Higher Education in response to the forces of globalization, and the impact this has had on the academic profession. However much of this is in the form of a 'protest literature' which mourns the loss of an often idealized academe based on principles of autonomy, equality and collegiality in the face of what are seen as the 'proletarising' forces of the market and its demands for efficiency and accountability (for example see Beckman , Cooper and Hill (2009)).

Although there is evidence from the literature that, in common with higher education institutions world-wide, a more 'managerial' style of administration has found its way into South African universities (see for example Ntshoe, Higgs, Higgs and Wolhuter (2008)), it is not always clear as to what type of governance patterns this has replaced, nor indeed the extent to which this may, or may not, have taken place.

There appears to be relatively little actual research on how academic managers, operating at the interface of competing academic and managerial demands, are actually adjusting to their changed environments, particularly in the South African context, and the degree to which management practices have indeed changed in response to both global and local pressures.

This research focuses on the perceptions of a limited number of academic managers as to how they currently perceive the nature of their roles, the nature and source of the conflicts they experience and the coping strategies they adopt in the face of such challenges. It is a snapshot at a particular point in time within a long established South African university.

1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of the research is to explore and describe academic managers' perceptions of their roles, whether they experience role conflict, the nature and source of the conflicting expectations placed upon them and the strategies they are adopting in the face of such challenges, at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in the year 2012.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Broadly the research sought to obtain qualitative understandings and insight into the nature of the role of the academic manager in the context of Wits, a long established South African 'traditional university', in the year 2012.

The primary research questions were:

What are the essential elements of the academic management role and who are the principal stakeholders to whom they are accountable? What authority and accountability is vested in the role and how are decisions made in practice?

Do respondents experience role conflict and ambiguity? If so, what coping strategies do individuals employ to deal with this?

To what extent do respondents perceive themselves to be adequately equipped, in terms of their experience and skills and the institutional support they receive, to deal with the demands placed on them? Are there identifiable areas where additional training/exposure and/or better institutional support could make a difference?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

This study gives some insight into the current nature of the role of the academic manager in a South African context, the extent to which they face common challenges and pressures, and provides some tentative explanations of the types of strategies they adopt in the face of these.

Although the study is very restricted in scope, it reveals some common areas of weakness in terms of a perceived lack of necessary skills (which may be addressable through courses) and a lack of institutional support in some areas that may be resolvable through a specific local intervention.

Furthermore, it gives some insight into the demands facing academic managers and the skill sets required, and as such may provide institutional management with food for thought in terms of recruitment, mentoring and succession planning.

Finally the study attempts to draw some reflections on the unique nature of the 'Academy', what drives it, and the seemingly intractable problems of how best to manage or lead it.

It is hoped that the study adds something to the existing body of knowledge in this area and possibly provides the basis for further research.

1.6 THE STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The review has been divided into five sections, each of which is then examined in turn. The sections are: The changing nature of higher education internationally; Managerialism and New Public

Management in the context of Higher education; Bureaucracy, Institutional Autonomy, Academic Freedom and Collegiality; South Africa: The changing context of higher education in the post apartheid era; and finally Caught in the Middle? – the role of the Academic Manager.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This research sought to obtain an in depth understanding of the world in which academic managers at Wits University operate in the year 2012, the challenges that face them and the strategies they are adopting in delivering on their mandates. A qualitative approach was therefore followed, based on a desk-based literature review followed by semi-structured interviews with eight academic managers from a range of different disciplines. A research questionnaire, based on the outcomes of the literature review, was developed and used in all interviews which were recorded and subsequently transcribed. This data set was coded and analysed to identify themes in line with the original research questions.

Chapter 4: Institutional context

The study is located within a single South African university, the University of Witwatersrand, over a particular period (May to December 2012). Chapter Four gives some specific background information on Wits University to enable the reader to better understand the institutional context in which the respondents operated.

Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis of findings

Chapter Five forms the bulk of the report. The themes and issues that arose from the interviews conducted are presented, analysed and discussed in relation to the principal research questions and the findings of the literature review.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and conclusions

Recommendations and reflections on the overall outcomes and usefulness of the study are presented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses specifically on actual, current perceptions of their roles, by middle managers in a South African University in the year 2012. Why is this of potential importance and interest?

The literature review reveals a story of major changes sweeping across higher education institutions in recent times. The very nature of the academic enterprise, what academics do and how they do it, the way the institutions they work for are managed…. all have been called into question.

A large and compelling body of literature claims that the nature of higher education internationally has fundamentally changed in the past three decades. In particular 'Managerialism' and 'New Public Management' emerge as powerful discourses that are claimed to have radically changed the way in which higher education institutions are now run in the developed nations.

If such changes are taking place, the question arises as to what the new 'managerialist' forms of administration may be displacing? The principal target appears to be what the German philosopher Max Weber described in an 'ideal form' as 'bureaucracy' and its unintended consequences (Weber, (1922)). Indeed large publicly funded higher education institutions have traditionally been characterized by formalised governance committees and hierarchical management structures, they have operated to a large extent by means of prescribed rules, regulations and procedures and have been staffed by career academics with security of tenure and long term career paths. In the specific context of higher education a number of further interrelated themes emerge principally around 'institutional autonomy',' academic freedom' and 'collegiality'and how academics, like many other professions, are having to adapt their practices in the context of complex, changing and ambiguous working environments.

In the South African context the lingering institutional and social legacy of the apartheid years, and the expectations unleashed by the relatively recent transition to democracy, have produced powerful, and sometimes contradictory, forces. This uniquely South African higher education context reflects the challenges of pursuing local transformation and social equity objectives in a rapidly changing political and economic environment where concerns about accountability, efficiency, quality, performance and competitiveness are gaining the ascendancy.

At the heart of this is the role of the Academic manager – those who are entrusted with the responsibility of managing the core research and teaching units and ultimately ensuring the long

term sustainability and indeed prosperity of the institutions they work for and the wider academic enterprise of which they are a part. The literature suggests that their roles have changed dramatically in the relatively recent past. Changing expectations and new demands from a much wider range of stakeholders have increased the levels of role conflict and ambiguity many experience, leading to feelings of alienation, disillusionment and even despair being reported in some quarters.

The literature review examines these themes in order to give context and background to the study itself which primarily focuses on the evolving role of academic managers and their experiences of relationships with stakeholders.

2.2 THE CHANGING NATURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALLY

In the course of the past three decades Higher Education internationally has been subject to powerful forces of change arising from the phenomenon of 'globalisation'. This is a concept which is in itself highly contested but essentially characterized by

> *interdependence, flows and exchanges, the role of new technologies, the integration of markets and the shrinking of time and space* (Wangenge-Ouma (2008) p. 216).

In this view, various historical forces of change are at work on an unprecedented world-wide scale to largely remove the old barriers created by time, space and national borders, putting in their place a borderless global economy where there are truly international markets for both labour and the various factors of production and for finished goods and services.

The pragmatic view of globalisation as somehow being inevitable, and requiring an uncritical response from states in adopting a range of economic and market led responses, in order to better position themselves in a more integrated and inherently more 'equal' world , is rejected by writers such as Ntshoe as being naïve. This literature argues that, if anything, the divisions between the 'developed' North and the 'under-developed' South are further entrenched.

Whilst accepting that globalization has come to mean

> *different things to different people and different things in different contexts,* it is also *associated with the ideologies and hegemony of Westernisation, McDonaldisation, Americanisaton, modernisation, internationalisation, industrialisation, development and underdevelopment.* (Ntshoe (2002) p. 83)

Colin Bundy (a former Vice Chancellor of Wits) argues that the specific impact of globalisation in the context of higher education can be characterized by three M's: "Massification, Marketisation and Managerialism" (Bundy (2005) p. 85).

Massification refers to the transition from providing an elitist style of university education to a privileged few, to providing broad based higher education programmes to an ever growing and widening section of the population as a whole.

Marketisation refers to the trend of reductions in government support for Higher Education with a consequent need for higher education institutions to diversify their funding bases, including the development of

> *third stream income, contract research, consultancies, spin-off companies, science parks, professional fundraising, the commercialization of intellectual property etc*. (Bundy (2005) p. 87)

Finally under the broad banner '*Managerialism'* Bundy identifies the 'new public management' approaches of decentralisation, the introduction of market mechanisms, and performance target setting in the public sector; coupled with a far more 'managerial' mode of internal governance.

The concept of 'managerialism' requires some further unpacking (see below).

2.3 MANAGERIALISM AND NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Much has been written in the literature on the effects of the introduction of 'new public management' and 'managerialism' over the decades of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000's on the Higher Education systems of the developed countries.

Deem and Brehony (2005) identify the following characteristics of 'new managerialism' in organisations:

> *The erasure of rule following bureaucratic procedures, emphasizing the primacy of management above all other activities, monitoring of employee performance, the attainment of financial and other targets, devising means of publicly auditing the quality of service delivery and the development of quasi-markets for services"* (Deem *et al* (2005) p. 220)

This theme is picked up by Uhr (1990) who defines managerialism as

> *the pursuit of results-oriented systems of government management through streamlined processes of decision making designed to allow greater autonomy but also greater responsibility for the field or programme manager* (Uhr (1990) p.22)

As Dixon *et al* (1998) go on to explain, the managerialist agenda fundamentally changes priorities in the way that public sector organizations are run. In this regard they identify the following key priority shifts.

Firstly, managerialism emphasises policy management and implementation rather than policy development and design. Secondly it stresses efficiency, effectiveness and quality rather than equity and process and introduces goal setting, incentives and performance definition, measurement and feedback. Thirdly it seeks to introduce private sector practices into the public domain and to attempt to create a 'competitive' environment for the delivery of public services. Fourthly it seeks to "defuse responsibility and devolve authority" by means of establishing various public accountability structures, and finally shifts the focus of such accountability from inputs and process towards outputs and outcomes. (Dixon *et al* (1998) pp. 166 – 167).

It can be inferred from the above that the introduction of 'managerialism' into public sector institutions will have significant consequences for the way that managers in such organizations are supposed to carry out their jobs.

The literature on the subject of the influence of managerialism in the higher education sector would seem to divide itself into two. The first, and possibly largest, body of literature is in the form of a 'protest literature' which highlights the destructive impact of managerialism in its most virulent forms and mourns the loss of a different set of values and a different way of doing things epitomized in a somewhat romanticized view of 'the academe', and encapsulated in the principles of 'academic freedom', 'autonomy' and 'collegiality'.

An example of this form of literature is provided by Beckham *et al* who argue that "the neo-liberalisation of education in England…is having profoundly harmful effects on the lives of individuals and society". On a societal level the harmful effects are seen in making "the provision of education services more unequal and selective, intensifying racial, gendered and class based hierarchies as a consequence" (Beckham, Cooper and Hill (2009) p. 311) whilst at the level of the individual academic the harm is well summarized by Kolsaker (2008) as leading to *"*feelings of proletarianisation and de-professionalisation" (Kolsaker (2008) p. 513).

Some of these themes were picked up by Webster *et al* (2001) in a 2001 survey involving interviews with 55 academics carried out across six South African institutions which sought to investigate reported symptoms of growing stress and dissatisfaction among academics. Based on the responses they obtained, Webster *et al* identified two distinct groups of academics which they labeled the

'pessimists' and the 'innovators'. Many of the 'pessimists', who were the larger group, had "become deeply pessimistic about their future in the academic workplace" (Webster *et al* (2001) p. 19). This was characterized by perceptions of an "extension of managerial control", an "increase in the intensity of work", a "loss of shared identity and sense of community", feelings of "powerlessness in the face of change" and an "increase in emotional labour" (Webster *et al* (2001) pp 12-16).This last concept of emotional labour was derived from the work of Hochschild (1983), who identified emotional labour as a process whereby the dictates of the workplace causes employees to either induce or suppress feelings. In 'surface acting' the employee pretends "to feel what we do not – we deceive other about what we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves" (Hochschild (1983) p.33). 'Deep Acting' goes one stage further and means "deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others" (Hochschild (1983) p.33).

The second set of literature, whilst acknowledging both the pervasiveness and invasiveness of managerialist approaches into spaces previously occupied by a more collegial style of running academic institutions, recognizes the inherent flaws in idealized conceptions of both models and follows a pragmatic approach which emphasizes how both forms survive and adapt in the 'real world'.

The second group of 'innovators', identified by the Webster *et al* (2001) survey (above) probably fall into this category. These were academics who were truly able to "recognize the extent to which the economy and society was being restructured and the way it demands new skills and different career trajectories" (Webster *et al* (2001) p. 18). They were able to adapt by 're-inventing themselves' through the way they thought about how they delivered and marketed their skills and services. The study goes on to give some concrete examples of this.

This pragmatic approach is highlighted by Kolsaker (2008), who, in presenting the findings of a 2008 survey of 11,000 academics across 11 different English universities, argues that at grass roots level academics are prepared to "tolerate managerialist modes of governance, provided autonomous niches can be protected" (Kolsaker (2008) p. 513).

Far from depicting a war between two competing ideologies in which one camp (the managers) gain in power and influence over the other camp (the academics) the second set of literature emphasizes a constructivist approach, implied in Foucault's interpretation of changing power relations that "implies no capitulation or loss of power by one party to another, focusing instead on how power relations are realigned and the self reconstituted" (Kolsaker (2008) p. 517)

2.4 BUREAUCRACY, INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND COLLEGIALISM

If managerialism is indeed the relatively new and powerful force of change depicted in much of the literature – what exactly is it changing? What pre-existing practices are threatened or displaced by the reforms that have swept through higher education in the recent past.

According to the literature, and indeed a vast range of politicians, governments and other proponents of 'new public management', the principal target of 'managerialist' reforms over the past three decades has been public service bureaucracy and the wastefulness, inefficiency and rule bound conformity it is accused of generating (see for example Polliitt (1998), Lapsley (2009), Paine (1999) and Mintzberg (1996).

Jaffee (2001) identifies three central principles underlying Max Weber's classic 'ideal model' of bureaucracy, namely "formalisation, instrumentalism and rational-legal authority" (Jafee (2001) p. 91). Formalisation refers to the extent that rules and procedures are documented and obeyed, critically this determines how office bearers behave in their roles – the duties attached to the role are central not the person who happens to hold that office. Instrumentalism conveys the idea that the organization has been designed to function like a machine, somehow divorced from human influence and interference, to almost 'automatically' achieve a particular purpose. Finally rational-legal authority explains how this 'bureaucratic machine' gets its human members to comply with the rules and regulations. Authority is formally vested in positions and is therefore 'legal' and, as office bearers in Weber's model are supposed to be recruited purely on the basis of expertise and qualifications, this should be accompanied by a belief among subordinates that this is the best (most rational) way to do things.

It is immediately apparent that the traditional concept of a university as an 'institution' of higher learning meets many of the criteria of a 'rational bureaucracy'. Universities tend to have complex formal structures, with delegation of different powers to senate and council and accompanied by a myriad of different committees, rules and regulations. Academics have traditionally had security of tenure and very structured career paths.

On top of this there are other somewhat unique features of the way that academics have traditionally run their institutions. Three inter-woven concepts appear to emerge from the literature namely: 'institutional autonomy', 'academic freedom' and 'colleagialism'. As might be expected, none of the three is the subject of a neat, or even agreed, definition and much of what has been

written about all of them may be the subject more of romantic myth than any objectively verifiable reality. Yet they do exist and are routinely used by various authors when explaining the internal shifts and changes in approach to governance and management issues that have taken place in higher education institutions in response to the onset of 'managerialism'.

The discourse around issues of institutional autonomy and academic freedom are well summarized by Divala and Waghid (2008). Based on the work of Saunders (2005), the issue of institutional autonomy can be seen as centering on "the right of the institution to carry out its affairs with as little interference as possible from external influences". In turn, 'academic freedom' refers to "the kinds of immunity which the university teacher, as a professional, needs to enjoy in order to function effectively" (Divala *et al* (2008) p.2).

These definitions are appealing in their apparent simplicity, but should not be viewed in an absolutist sense. As the authors warn

> *The problems that Saunders (2005) raises involve signaling the idea that being autonomous means not being influenced by any other factors or sources apart from oneself …It pre-supposes an existence of self in isolation, or what others can simply prefer to call a 'wonderland.'* (Divala *et al* (2008) p.3)

Within the framework of institutional autonomy and academic freedom the concept of collegiality emerges as the implicit model governing the relations between members of the academe. In its idealized version Waters (1989) (quoted in Johnson and Cross (2004)) identifies three themes

> "*The exercise of authority on the sole basis of* ***expertise."*** *"****equality…****authority based on the technical competence of a 'company of equals'* and *'****consensus'.*** *All members of such organisations must participate in the decision making process and only decisions that have the full support of the entire collective carry the weight of moral authority*" (Johnson *et al* (2004) p.37)

Again there are problems associated with such an idealistic approach. Johnson *et al*, talking from the perspective of the history of South African higher education, take issue in particular with Waters' view of 'a company of equals'; saying that he confuses a sense of identity or membership of the academy with equality. For example, in the South African case "under apartheid the practice of collegiality was predominantly race and gender-based". Johnson *et al* would rather thus "talk about collegiality as a highly contextual phenomenon which assumes varied forms and degrees of expression" (Johnson *et al* (2004) p.37)

Concepts such as 'academic freedom', institutional autonomy' and 'colleagiality' make it very apparent that academics see themselves as some form of collective. This collective identity is

perhaps more analogous to the more loosely defined idea of a 'guild', than to a 'classic profession', such as the medical or legal professions, which are characterized by the establishment of relatively autonomous professional bodies to control membership, establish standards and regulate practice. Nevertheless the academic profession does appear to have much in common with their more regulated counterparts in struggling to adapt their practices in uncertain, ambiguous and changing times.

Noordegraaf (2007) argues that the nature of professionalism is changing in the modern era under the impetus of factors such as neo-liberal managerial and consumer control. He says that a transition is taking place from concepts of "'pure' to 'hybrid' professionalism in domains such as health care and social work", and that present day professionalism is moving away from "controlled content" to "content of control" (Noordegraaf (2007) p.761).

'Hybridised professionalism' is a far wider and much more relational concept than 'pure professionalism', embracing many different occupational fields and calling for interdisciplinary knowledge, interactive skill sets and the ability to "learn how to behave in neo-bureaucratic settings, with hybrid organizational forms" It is "about showing that one is becoming professional without necessarily ever becoming one" (Noordegraaf (2007) p.775)

In an earlier age it was perhaps possible for professions to have real control over the content of their work through the way they organised themselves into recognised bodies with powers of association, jurisdiction, knowledge transfer, codes of conduct and supervision, but "it is difficult to institutionalise control in loosely ordered knowledge or network societies" (Noordegraaf (2007) p.761). For example;

> *professionals not only become part of strict organizational regimes with planning and control, performance measurement, quality models, strategic frameworks and divisional structures, but are also forced to become managers, at least partly.* (Noordegraaf (2007) p.776)

In such confusing and often contradictory settings where 'control of content' is almost impossible, the 'hybridised professional' needs to see professionalism as a "means for improving the content of control". It becomes more about "putting on a professional performance to enact meaningful and legitimate work practices" (Noordegraaf (2007) p.775). Ultimately Noordegraaf argues that "the search for present day professionalism is a search for communal or social identity and for appropriate work identities" (Noordegraaf (2007) p.780)

2.5 SOUTH AFRICA: THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE POST APARTHEID ERA

The literature on South African Higher Education, since the democratic transition in 1994, reflects the challenges of pursuing local transformation and social equity objectives in a rapidly changing political and economic environment where concerns about accountability, efficiency, quality, performance and competitiveness are gaining the ascendancy.

Four principal themes run through the literature. Firstly, the challenge of significantly improving participation rates, through 'massification', and at the same time significantly altering the racial composition of staff and students attending universities so as to reflect the wider demographics of South African society. Secondly, the challenge of improving quality, efficiency and outputs throughout the system in terms of (for example) improving the numbers and types of degrees awarded, student throughput rates, the quality of the teaching and learning environment, research outputs and greater accountability to a more diverse range of stakeholders. Thirdly the challenge of enabling 'historically disadvantaged institutions' (HDI's) to compete on a more equal footing with the historically 'white' universities. Fourthly and finally, the role of the state in funding higher education institutions and how it drives the multi-faceted transformation agenda it has set for itself. These themes are discussed further below.

A National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) discussion document in 1995 (quoted by Hartshorne (1996)) points out "the negative consequences of the apartheid legacy" on the higher education system. "In 1988 55% of university students were white and 32% were African, while at the Technikons 71% were white and only 11.4% were African".

With such inequitable and racially skewed numbers, it is hardly surprising that one of the principal priorities of the incoming ANC government in 1994 was to implement policies aimed at dramatically changing the student participation rates in the South African institutions, and significantly improving access opportunities for the majority black population. Indeed the NCHE's principal recommendation was that South Africa should move away from an elitist system which provided higher education opportunities to only a privileged few, to a 'massified' system providing a wider range of opportunities to far greater numbers.

South African universities can claim considerable success in working towards this aim. By 2001, Cooper and Subotsky were able to declare that South Africa had experienced a 'revolution', with the proportion of African students in the total university enrolment increasing from 41% in 1994 to over

60% by 2001. (Cooper *et al,* 2001) This was achieved in the context of an overall growth of 193,000 in the total numbers of students enrolled in the system.

For the universities the practicalities of increasing the absolute numbers of students entering their establishments, whilst at the same time dramatically changing the demographic profile of their student populations, have revolved around the question of access. This immediately raises for them, and what is arguably the most problematic of the many contradictions they face, the inherent tension between issues of 'equity' and issues of 'quality' and 'development'.

Akojee and Nkomo (2007) contend that these tensions have led to two different approaches to access which are discernible in South African policy since 1994. They typify these as "access as participation" and "access with success". The first approach dominated the immediate post-apartheid years, and can be described as policies designed to address the problems of access by increasing participation by black students at institutions that were previously off limits to them. However, now that the de-racialisation of the system has been largely achieved (see above), they argue that the second approach ("access with success") is rapidly assuming a greater importance (Akoojee *et al*, (2007)).

This second approach forces one to look beyond mere attendance and concentrate on the outputs of the system in terms of degrees awarded and student through-put rates. The figures here are not encouraging: Akoojee *et al* quote a report by Rossouw (2001) which suggested that at least 25% of all South Africa's students fail, at an estimated cost to the system of R1,6 billion annually, and also a report by Cloete and Bunting (2000), which reported appallingly low throughput rates for black students in key fields "3 percent in the engineering field, 12 per cent in the natural sciences and 9 per cent in medicine and engineering" (Akoojee *et al* (2007) p.391).

There are a host of issues here, which one can loosely group under 'quality', whether this refers to the standards of the teaching and learning environment, the relevance and impact of research outputs, efficiency in producing a certain of quantum of output for a given level of input, effectiveness in meeting the expectations of stakeholders and not least the way in which each institution as a whole embraces and ultimately finds a niche for itself in the global knowledge economy.

Quality research output is possibly the most important benchmark by which universities are rated internationally, and apart from mere 'status' it is also critical in terms of a country's ability to innovate, and to expand and diversify its economy. A key indicator of a nation's research capability

is the ratio of Gross expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to Mouton (2008) "most developing countries view 1% as the gold standard", and in fact South Africa comes fairly close to this (the 2005/06 Research and Development Survey indicated that it stood at 0.93%). Achieving and then maintaining this ratio at, or above, 1% is viewed as critical by most people in the scientific community to achieve a sustained, long term and credible research capacity.

However, Vaughan, Reddy, Noakes and Moran (2007) argue that on its own this will not be enough, saying that the limited research funds that there are, should be channeled "solely towards individuals and institutions that have the ability to respond swiftly and resolutely to the challenge of lifting research to a new level" (Vaughan *et al* (2007) p.25).They are at odds with the current government funding formula which spreads research funding between all 23 universities, and argue that, Rand for Rand, limited research monies would be better spent in the 6-10 universities that already have an established research reputation.

Ironically, the immediate post-apartheid pressure on historically white institutions to transform the demographic profiles of both their staff and students, without any significant change in the regulatory system in place, was an unmitigated disaster for the so called Historically Disadvantaged Institutions by allowing "the better-endowed and well-resourced historically white institutions to cream off the best black students and staff" (Cloete and Moja (2005) p.706). The wave of government-driven mergers, initiated by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmall's department in 2003, which succeeded in reducing the higher education landscape from 36 institutions (21 universities and 15 Technikons) to today's total of 23 institutions (comprising a mix of universities, comprehensives and universities of technology) was in part a practical response to this perceived institutional apartheid. The mergers were widely resented at the time by the higher education community in general, who felt that they had not been properly consulted and further that many of the mergers made little sense from a purely practical perspective. The ramifications of this are still the subject of rancor in many quarters today.

The State's declared intention, however, is to concentrate on 'steering rather than rowing' (Osborne and Gaebler (1992)) – that is the government's official policy is not to interfere directly in the internal running of the institutions, but rather to steer them in the required direction through a combination of creating an enabling policy environment and the way in which it allocates funding grants.

State funding remains the most important source of funding for South African Universities, albeit (in common with higher education systems worldwide) it has declined in relative importance in recent years as a result both of declining state allocations, relative to other priorities, and universities' own efforts to diversify their funding streams. Wangenge-Ouma and Cloete (2008) report a wide discrepancy in the degree of reliance on state funding by individual universities (ranging from government funding comprising 30% to almost 65% of total revenues in 2007, with an average of 50%). Overall they report that , as a percentage of GDP, "state funding of higher education declined from a high of 0.82 per cent in 1996 to a low of 0.67% in 2006*"* (Wangenge-Ouma *et al* (2008) *p.908).*

The current funding framework was issued in May 2006, and is described by Walwyn (2008) as "complex and multi-dimensional". How effective the grant actually is in terms of steering universities in the direction the government wishes them to go is the subject of much debate. For example Walwyn criticizes the 'institutional factor' grant, designed to assist the smaller universities (primarily the HDIs) as being counter intuitive. He asks, if the government wishes to massify the system, what is the long term logic in awarding a grant for institutional size based on a weighting factor in *inverse proportion* to the size of the student body? The anomalies of the differentiated course subsidy system are highlighted by Cloete and Moja. For instance a course in performing arts will currently attract a far higher subsidy than say computer science or engineering, based simply on the historical precedent that it has always costed more. This they say, suggests "that there is no conscious steering towards any strategic or development objectives" (Cloete and Moja (2005)).

2.6 CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE? THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC MANAGER

In this, the final section of the literature review, the focus is narrowed still further to the level of individual academic manager. Most of the literature in this area focuses on the pressures widely experienced in European, North American and Australian higher education contexts by academic managers in having to adopt 'managerialist' approaches and techniques in the way they run their institutions.

Under pressures for greater accountability and the need to do more with less, "the need for strong institutional management emerges. Institutional management is supposed to be more business-like, while 'democratic governance' is regularly seen as getting in the way of efficiency and effectiveness" (de Boer and Goedegebuure (2009) p.350).

According to de Boer *et al*, in many European countries the time of the scholarly dean, elected by his/her peers as 'primus inter pares' has long since passed and his/her place has been usurped by an 'executive dean'. Typically this person is a member of the senior management team who is *selected* (rather than *elected*), often on a limited short term contract and frequently from outside, and has to deliver against specific performance outputs and targets. Academic deans, although still expected to provide intellectual leadership, are "also expected to be fiscal experts, fundraisers, politicians and diplomats" (de Boer *et al* (2009) p.353).

In the South African context this theme is picked up by Johnson *et al* (2004) "a quiet scholarly individual is being overtaken by an executive image: an academic leader is seen as one who is politically astute and economically savvy" (Johnson *et al* (2004) p.34). Some idea of the range of roles a dean may now be expected to fulfill are captured in the following metaphors quoted by Johnson *et al*: 'the dove of peace' (brokering between various warring factions), 'the dragon' (keeping internal and external threats at bay), the 'diplomat' (facilitating colleagial life), the 'translator' (of the goals of senior management to staff, and vice versa) and a 'boundary person' (working at the interface of different groups) etc.

Clegg and McAuley (2005) identify four dominant discourses in the management literature since the 1970s on the development of the middle manager: The first, and earliest (from the 1970s), discourse sees middle management as representing core organizational values, a buffer between "essentially transient" senior management and the "essentially instrumental orientation" of the employee. In the second discourse (from the early 1980s) the middle manager is seen as "essentially redundant" a "layer of noise" between visionary senior management and "soon to be empowered" employees. In the third discourse (emerging from the mid to late 1980's) the middle manager is seen as the key agent of control, a "corporate bureaucrat" who acts on behalf of senior management. Finally the fourth discourse (from the late 1980's) sees the middle manager in the roles of mentor, coach and guide, who wields influence in a manner that is essentially benign and based on deep knowledge and understanding of core organizational values.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The literature suggests that there are many contradictory forces currently at play in the higher education workspace which must inevitably impact on both the formal expectations around the role of an academic manager and the informal pressures incumbents experience in trying to meet such expectations.

If the traditional cornerstones of a rational bureaucracy can be seen as 'fairness', 'equity' and 'process', what happens on the ground when the guardians of such cornerstones are confronted with growing demands for 'efficiency', 'accountability' and 'quantifiable results' that the literature tells us are at the forefront of the 'managerialist' agenda? In the South African context, how does one 'massify' the system, transforming the demographics of student and staff populations in the process, while at the same time cutting back on academic staff numbers and demanding significant increases in student success rates and quality research output? If a range of relatively 'new' and more organised interest groupings and funders are now making their influence felt as legitimate stakeholders in the 'higher education enterprise', how are conflicting interests being accommodated?

At the very least, this would seem to require exceptional leadership and negotiating skills from a cadre of academic managers, the majority of whom (the literature tells us) have come up through, and continue to be recruited from, the somewhat sheltered ranks of academia. It seems hardly surprising that, according to the literature, the introduction of 'new public management' practices in institutions of higher learning has been accompanied by doubt, uncertainty, disillusionment and even outright resistance in many quarters.

How in practice do academic managers cope with these changes? What role conflict and ambiguity are they experiencing in trying to achieve a balance between these competing forces? If, as seems inevitable, choices are having to be made on the ground; who is making these choices? How are they being made and in what direction, if any, is the practice of management in higher education in the year 2012 moving between the competing ideologies and interest groupings described?

The study wished to examine these issues in some depth and through the eyes of those who are actually experiencing and dealing with these contradictions at the 'chalkface'. It was recognized from the outset that the limited scope of a 25% Masters dissertation would not permit a study of sufficient breadth or depth to examine all of these issues and draw any generally applicable conclusions, but there was potential value in taking a 'snapshot in time' of the lived experiences of a limited number of academic managers at Wits University in the year 2012. Perhaps some of their experiences would provide insights and contribute something to the relatively under-researched knowledge base of this particular topic in a South African context.

The next section describes the research methodology used to achieve this.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is a basic, exploratory, interpretative, qualitative study. The study is exploratory in that this is a relatively unexplored area in South African research. It is interpretative in that it focuses on understanding how the academic managers interviewed, the respondents, construct meaning in the workplace situation they find themselves in. The approach is based on what the German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey called "*Verstehen" ,* trying to gain an *empathetic understanding* of the everyday lived experiences of people in different social settings , coupled with extensive analysis of the data gathered to construct meaning from their perspectives as

> *True meaning is rarely obvious on the surface: one reaches it only through a detailed study of the text, contemplating its many messages, and seeking the connections among its parts* (Neuman (2011) p. 88).

Finally as a qualitative research study it concerns itself with "human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves" (Johnson (2005) p. 62).

The design consisted of two main components: a literature review and eight in depth interviews with academic managers from the University of the Witwatersrand.

The literature review serves the purpose of gaining understandings of the current state of higher education management practice and theory, both internationally and locally, particularly as it affects academic managers, and importantly, to help explain and contextualize specific data and observations arising from the interviews.

The aim and the value of the in depth interviews with individual managers is to provide thick descriptions and "to take multiple perspectives into account and to understand the influences of multilevel social systems on subjects' perspectives and behaviours" (Johnson (2005) p. 66). A semi-structured interview technique was used because of "its primary strength of greater flexibility by the interviewee on the topics" (Johnson (2005) p. 68). This allowed a conversation with the interviewee to develop and unique and different perspectives to emerge of the same phenomena.

3.2 SAMPLING METHOD

Interviews were conducted with eight academic managers in middle to senior management positions within Wits University, between May and December 2012, as reflected in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Interview Record

Respondent Number	Date of Interview
Respondent No 1	22 May 2012
Respondent No 2	12 June 2012
Respondent No 3	18 October 2012
Respondent No 4	6 November 2012
Respondent No 5	15 November 2012
Respondent No 6	26 November 2012
Respondent No 7	28 November 2012
Respondent No 8	10 December 2012

Source: Author

Further specific demographic data gathered have been removed from the above table in order to protect the anonymity of participants. The sample included four Heads of School, one Deputy Head of School, one Dean, one Deputy Dean and two members of the Senior Executive Team at Wits. They ranged in age from 45 years (the youngest participant) to 57 years (the oldest participant). Four of the participants were female and four were male and they had been in their current positions for periods ranging from 10 months (shortest period) to 10 years (longest period). The sample also covers a broad range of disciplines from Humanities to Commerce, Law and Management to Science and finally to Engineering and the Built Environment.

The respondent numbers in Table 1 are used in Chapter Five, Presentation and Analysis of Findings, to attribute the reflections and comments made by participants during their interviews. In instances where no respondent number has been attributed, this is to further protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondent, often specifically at their behest.

This is a very limited convenience sample, which severely restricts the comparability and generality of any findings. However this research does not set out to make any general claims, rather it hopes, through a process of focused in depth discussions with academic managers, to provide more

nuanced understandings of the world in which they have to work, how they are adapting and some indication of what drives them to do what they have to do.

Leads (of potential participants) were initially generated from lecturers and work colleagues, after that a snowball sampling technique was used. Neuman defines snowball sampling as a form of purposive or judgmental sampling that is an appropriate method for selecting cases in a network, the crucial feature being that "each person is connected with another through a direct or indirect linkage" (Neuman (2011) p. 222). Like a snowball, the sample "begins small but becomes larger as it is rolled on wet snow and picks up additional snow" (Neuman (2011) p. 223). The principal advantage of the snowballing technique is that it enables the researcher to more easily identify and establish contact with members of a particular or specialised group (in this case academic managers) but it is not appropriate for situations where one is looking to "pick the 'average housewife' or the 'typical school'" (Neuman (2011) p. 222)

'Snowballing' was used in this research to the extent that, at the end of each interview I asked participants to supply contact details of any colleague(s) whom they thought would have interesting perspectives and who would be willing to participate. Although it was difficult to get interviews at the beginning (note the gap between June and October above), the snowballing technique was very effective in the latter stages, and by the end I could have easily found several more participants.

The sample is partially stratified and reflects a range of seniority from the school level (Heads of School and Deputy Heads) through to the Faculty Level (Assistant Dean and Dean) to members of the Senior Executive Team. The focus of the research was on the critical interface between the demands of the 'academy' vs. the demands of administrative management. It was anticipated that the concerns of those closer to the academy would revolve more around the academic issues of teaching and research and that those further up the hierarchy would be more concerned with purely management and administrative issues. This did indeed prove to be the case and at the same time it was possible to identify some areas which appear to be common issues of concern across all levels of management.

3.3 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

An interview schedule was developed (Appendix A) and was used as the basis of all eight interviews conducted. Detailed questions were grouped under four main theme headings as follows: Exploring your perceptions of your role as an Academic Manager; Exploring your perceptions of the influence of stakeholders and their impact on your role as an Academic Manager; Exploring perceptions of

your preparedness and the support available for your role as an Academic Manager; and Exploring your perceptions of the wider Institutional context.

These themes were selected firstly to attempt to gain an overall understanding of how participants perceived and carried out their roles in a very practical and real sense based on their day to day experiences, within that to explore potentially conflicting demands that could give rise to perceptions of role conflict and ambiguity and finally to elicit responses on how well prepared candidates were to take on these challenges, the support available to them and the coping strategies they had adopted.

The schedule was only given to the participants at the interview itself. I was not looking for stock or pre-prepared answers, the questions were designed to encourage participants to think about their roles and talk freely about their personal experiences and perceptions. I soon came to realize after the first couple of interviews that the 'meat' I was looking for could emerge *at any point* in the interview, and in fact was most likely to emerge as respondents gained confidence and started to talk freely about their 'lived experiences'.

I came to look on the interview schedule as a framework around which discussion could take place, and useful in the sense that it seemed to have a sufficient number of 'triggers' to generate interesting responses and reflections that addressed the *overall* research questions.

3.4 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

All interviews were conducted face to face, and were recorded. Interviewees were asked if they were willing to participate, guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, sent a copy of the proposal beforehand, advised that the interview would be recorded, and informed that they would receive copies of the draft report before publication.

The further the study progressed, the more it became apparent how absolutely critical confidentiality and anonymity were in getting the type of insights I was looking for. Talking frankly about your role as a manager, the difficulties and frustrations you experience on a daily basis and your perceptions on the effectiveness or otherwise of the support you receive, both from above and below, is always going to be a sensitive subject area, particularly in the context of a case study of just one institution.

At every stage in the process therefore all necessary steps were taken to re-assure participants about this, from the wording of the introductory email, to the design of an 'Informed Consent' form

(see Appendix B) which was given to each participant to read and sign before the interview commenced, through to the final step of circulating a final draft of the report to all participants to review (and raise any concerns) before final publication.

Even at this (very late) stage one participant requested that all references to age, sex, race, background, job title and disciplinary field that could be specifically linked to a particular respondent be removed. This necessitated a very careful re-look at how comments had been attributed to respondents in the data analysis section, some careful further editing of the content of some of the quotes and explains the paucity of the information shown in Table 1 on Page 21. The point was brought home to the author that ultimately an institution like Wits is a small and tight knit community, people in high profile positions are very well known in that community, and research on sensitive topics cannot leave a trail of 'clues' that might enable someone to follow the trail and work out exactly who each respondent was, when this is a concern for the individuals.

Indeed, the eventual success of the snowballing technique, in enabling me to progressively build my sample, could well be attributed to the participants who had already been interviewed gaining sufficient confidence in the process, that they then felt comfortable enough to recommend their colleagues.

3.5 IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The aim of the individual interviews was to focus very directly on the current role of each particular individual in his/her specific role, drawing out perceptions of the 'different hats' the individual was expected to wear, the different skill sets required, the competing interests at play in their environment, how they coped with these challenges and the type of support they received.

As discussed above, a semi-structured interview schedule (refer to Appendix A) was developed in preparation for the interviews and given to each participant at the interview itself. In the role of interviewer, I set the scene by talking briefly in general terms about my interest in the subject matter and some of the themes that seemed to emerge from the literature. In most cases the participants were then allowed to work through the interview schedule answering the questions as they saw fit, but the interviewer would intervene where further clarity was needed, or to encourage them to expand on a particular point or issue they had raised.

All eight interviews were recorded and a complete transcript was made of each.

3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF DATA

3.6.1. Reliability

Reliability, according to Neuman, means "dependability or consistency" (Neuman (2011) p. 196). The data generated by this study are dependable and consistent to the extent that all participants were subjected to the same process and the same set of interview questions. Furthermore, as discussed above, all interviews were recorded and verbatim transcripts have been made.

The fact that the interviewees were asked identical questions and that many of them raised similar topics and common issues introduces an element of triangulation into the results and findings of the study. Neuman defines triangulation as "the idea that looking at something from multiple points of view improves accuracy" (Neuman (2011) p. 149). For example, at the time of this study, almost all of the participants identified the slowness of response by centralized HR and legal functions in certain situations as impeding effective management at the school level, and that there were significant divisions at Wits University between the administration staff and academic staff, and between academics and senior management.

3.6.2. Validity

In terms of qualitative research, 'validity' introduces the concept of truthfulness. Here one should perhaps emphasize that much of the data generated by this study is anectdotal, and unique in the sense that it relates to individual life experiences and perceptions of respondents. With this sort of data it is very difficult to objectively verify its accuracy and 'truthfulness'. However, all respondents were well respected senior academics, managers and leaders within their institution and there seems little incentive or reason for any of them to have deliberately lied or falsified any of the information they gave in response to questions asked.

Whilst categorically stating that in his view "Validity means truthful" (Neuman (2011) p. 196) Neuman goes on to say that qualitative researchers are ultimately more interested in authenticity than the idea that there is only one version of the truth. Authenticity in this context means "giving a fair, honest and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it every day" (Neuman (2011) p. 196). The presentation and analysis of findings attempts to do just this.

A further source of validity was to use a peer reference group. Merriam (2009) comments that this is in fact a process that is 'inbuilt' into all post graduate studies "since each member of the (dissertation) committee reads and comments on the findings" (Merriam (2009) p. 220). Beyond this, at various points in the study I discussed progress, and the findings that were emerging, with a

number of people who I either knew, or to whom I was referred, as having expertise or being knowledgeable in this area. They are acknowledged below.

Dr Bernadette Johnson, Director of Research at Vaal University of Technology, whose doctoral thesis "Towards post-managerialism in Higher Education, the case of management change at the University of the Witwatersrand 1999 – 2004" is referred to several times in this dissertation.

Patrick Fish, a writer and researcher associated with Higher Education South Africa for many years.

Murray Cairns, a lecturer within the School of Public and Development Management at Wits.

Prof Edward Webster, formerly of Wits University, who published a pioneering paper "At the Chalkface: Managerialism and the Changing Academic Workplace", which is referred to in the literature review.

Prof David Dickinson, Head of the Academic Staff Association at Wits, specifically on the background to the ongoing staff dispute.

Oliver Seale, a former colleague from HESA, currently the Manager of Special Projects in the Vice Chancellor's office at Wits, and who is currently completing a doctorate on a similar subject.

I consulted them either to seek their advice on the overall research approach; and/or for their specific perspectives on the subject matter and the kind of responses that were being generated. This was extremely valuable at the time and has definitely impacted on both the research approach and the subsequent presentation and analysis of data.

Perhaps the most important strategy for ensuring internal validity is to refer back to the people who were actually interviewed and ask them if what has been presented is a fair representation; a process called 'respondent validation'.

> *This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you have observed* (Maxwell (2005) p.111).

All respondents to this study were sent a copy of the final draft and asked to comment. If respondents did not reply by Wednesday 27 March 2013 they were advised that it would be assumed that they were satisfied with the way their contribution had been presented and interpreted. Four of the eight respondents did reply:

Three of these respondents (No 3, No 6 and No 8) said they had reviewed the document, were satisfied with the way their comments had been presented and had no concerns regarding either confidentiality or anonymity.

Respondent No 5 raised a number of concerns in that he/she felt that his/her anonymity had not been sufficiently protected and that some of his/her comments had been misrepresented. Changes were then implemented in Chapter Five and the revised draft sent back to Respondent No 5. Respondent No 5 replied to say that he/she was satisfied with the changes and the presentation of his/her responses.

3.7 OBJECTIVITY

Whereas in quantitative research 'objectivity' can easily be demonstrated through the application of prescribed and tested techniques, in qualitative research this is far more difficult. A degree of subjectivity is an inherent part of the process and neither can the researcher completely distance him/herself from this process and the outcomes it produces. Holliday says that this places the qualitative researcher in a situation where there is a constant need to maintain a balance between *opportunity* and *principle*. This means "taking the opportunity to encounter the research setting while maintaining the principles of social science" (Holiday (2006) p. 9). The best way for qualitative research to handle this he maintains is to "show its workings every single time" (Holiday (2006) p. 8). He says this is just like maths at school! Getting an answer is insufficient on its own, one needs to show the method:

"*qualitative researchers are increasingly expected to come out and tell it as it really happened"* (Holiday (2006) p. 7).

With respect to the author's own biases, I believe that the fact that I am neither a career academic, nor an employee of Wits University, has perhaps given me some extra distance from the subject matter, and may have encouraged some participants to be more forthright than they would otherwise have been.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

3.8.1 Primary Data

The primary data generated by this study comprise the transcriptions of eight in depth interviews carried out with academic managers, over 40,000 words in total. Subsequent to this, extensive open and axial coding was used to group the data under themes. Spreadsheets were used to achieve this – each spreadsheet had nine columns, the first with the relevant themes and the other eight being

allocated one column to each of the eight respondents. In this way it was possible to compare what correspondents had said about individual topics. The first spreadsheet simply compared responses to the actual questions asked on the interview schedule, subsequent spreadsheets would pick up crosscutting themes, for example what people had said about 'bureaucracy' or 'managerialism' .

Both the presentation and the analysis of data are discussed in Chapter Five. This is based on Neuman's first, second and third order interpretation. First order interpretation involves "interpretations from the point of view of the people being studied". In essence this is the story, told from their perspective, of the academic managers interviewed, a story which runs throughout Chapter Five. Second order interpretation brings in "qualitative interpretations from the point of view of the researcher". The researcher's analysis and interpretation of what the academic managers said is also included throughout. Finally, third order interpretation is a process "whereby a researcher assigns general theoretical significance" (Neuman (2011) p. 160). At various stages the content of what has been presented and analysed is discussed in the context of broader theories that arise in the literature.

3.8.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data in the form of published reports and information available from websites was gathered on Wits University where the research took place. These data are presented in Chapter Four to substantiate and verify the institutional background and context in which respondents operated.

3.9 DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

3.9.1 Restricting the scope

Achieving something 'do-able' within time and resource constraints was the initial challenge and in fact persisted throughout the study.

Eventually, of the multiplicity of themes that emerged, I restricted the presentation and analysis of findings to those themes that were of greatest applicability to the original research questions.

3.9.2 Interviews

After my first two interviews in May and June 2012, there was a long gap during which I made some desultory efforts with no success. Then I became aware through news reports that a staff dispute, mainly over pay, had arisen on Wits campus. Although such a dispute was outside of the scope of this study, perhaps heightened tensions between management and the academic staff would

generate more interest in the subject matter of my study? This indeed proved to be the case and, as discussed above, I was able thereafter to effectively use a snowballing technique to get more than sufficient further interviews.

3.10 CONCLUSION

Operating according to the parameters of the research approach and methodology as described in this section, the intention was to create a space within the confines of a semi-structured 45 minute interview where participants could talk freely and widely about their roles, any ambiguity or conflict they experienced and how they handled this in their day to day interactions with stakeholders. It was hoped thereby to also create an opportunity whereby participants could reflect on the forces, internal and external, that impacted on their work environment and perhaps drove them to do what they felt they had to do. It was anticipated that cross cutting themes would inevitably emerge that could then be addressed in the subsequent data analysis.

CHAPTER 4: INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT (WITS UNIVERSITY)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to set the context of the institution in which this study is located. This brief overview attempts to give some idea of the size and scale of Wits University, the major teaching and research disciplines and how its sees its own future development in terms of its strategic planning towards the year 2022. The information for this has been gleaned principally from published booklets and the university website.

A very brief background to the staff dispute of 2012 is also given, as this dispute took place during the course of this study, and may to some extent have influenced some of the views of the respondents at that time.

4.2 THE CONTEXT OF WITS UNIVERSITY

4.2.1 Brief History and Background

The University of the Witwatersrand is one of South Africa's longest established universities, having been granted full university status in 1922. Wits is perhaps internationally best known for its work in paleontology, having acquired the Sterkfontein site (subsequently declared a World Heritage site) and the neighbouring Swartkrans farm in the 1960s.

In the South African context Wits has always been a 'traditional' English speaking university. It was the site of considerable student unrest and anti apartheid activism in the 1980s, and was one of the few universities not to be directly affected by the mergers, initiated by the Department of Education in 2003, which sought to transform the South African Higher Education landscape at that time. That is not to say that Wits was somehow immune to the wider changes affecting the sector around the turn of the millennium. According to Barchiesi (2000) greater authority was devolved to Deans, who were appointed as executive managers on renewable five year contracts, and budget austerity measures were introduced resulting in service staff retrenchments and mergers of schools and departments.

Since 2000, Wits has been implementing expansion and modernization plans across several of the Johannesburg campuses. It "*aspires to be a leading research intensive university firmly embedded in the top 100 world universities by 2022*"(University of the Witwatersrand , 2010, p. 5). Wits is currently ranked in the top 226-250 range, according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, announced on 4 October 2012.

4.2.2 Size and Scope

In terms of student numbers Wits had a total headcount of 29,058 students in 2011, of whom 16,437 (57%) were black, up from 25,168 students in 2007, of whom 12,187 (48%) were black (University of the Witwatersrand , 2012).

Total staff headcount in 2011 was 7,503 of whom 4,877 are listed as academic staff, although the 'full time equivalent' number of academic staff for the same year was only 892. Of the 2,626 non academic support staff in 2011, 40 are described as 'Executive/Administration/Management Professional' (University of the Witwatersrand, 2012).

Wits currently has five major teaching and research faculties: Commerce, Law and Management; Engineering and the Built Environment; Health Sciences; Humanities; and Science. Four of these are reflected in the research sample of this study.

In term of research output, Wits has seen a steady increase in NRF rated researchers from 137 in 2004 to 230 in 2011, whilst the number of NRF A-rated researchers has increased from 9 in 2004 to 15 in 2011(University of the Witwatersrand , 2012).

4.2.3 The 2012 staff dispute

A long standing dispute, principally over pay, came to a head on 2 August 2012, when three Wits staff unions ALTSA, ASAWU and NEHAWU embarked on a one day strike. This was almost an unprecedented step for the principal union involved, ASAWU (the Academic Staff Association of Wits University). ASAWU had, until this point, a history of generally cooperative relations with university management, and the strike option is usually seen a last resort for the majority of its members. It currently represents over 700 of the academic staff at the university.

Although the principal issue was a dispute with management over pay, it seems clear from a brief review of some of the comments posted by members on the ASAWU website ('Public comments made by ASAWU members in the September 2012 ballot') that beneath the surface lie some deep and long held resentments:

> *Senior Management at the University are now shown publicly to be devious, untruthful, disorganized and contemptuous of academic staff.*
>
> *The salary conflict is the day to day manifestation of a much deeper conflict and that pertains to the fundamental absence of visionary leadership amongst the current echelon.*
>
> *The autocratic decision making within this University by upper level management is woeful.*

Management is treating academics like farm workers: you can see the overbearing and contemptuous attitude.

(http://www.asawu.org.za/docs/2012-9-26-PublicCommentsMadebyASAWUMembersintheSeptember2012ballot.pdf)

A second one day strike was held on 28 August 2012 and the dispute, which has been officially registered with the CCMA (Council for Mediation and Arbitration) was still ongoing at the time of writing (March 2013).

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses the findings, arising from the in depth interviews, in relation to the primary research questions. The section headed 'The Role of the Academic Manager' reviews and reflects on what emerged as the essential elements of the academic management role, in the eyes of the respondents. This is followed by a section headed 'Stakeholders', where the role of the principal external and internal stakeholders, identified by respondents, is examined with respect to their influence on how respondents carried out their roles.

The next section, headed 'Decision Making', presents an analysis of what respondents said about how decisions are made in practice, and their reflections on the degree of autonomy they felt comfortable in exercising when decisions had to be made. Respondents reported that they sometimes experienced personal angst when having to make difficult decisions and thus the following section 'Role Conflict' examines the sources of frustration and tension identified by respondents, those factors in their working environment that seemingly thwart them and seem to stand in the way of optimal performance.

Leading directly on from this is a section titled 'Coping Strategies' which identifies some 'tried and trusted' techniques developed by respondents in dealing with various challenges that routinely confront them. Finally, the last section in this chapter 'Preparedness and Skills Gaps', discusses the extent to which the respondents perceived themselves to be adequately equipped, in terms of their experience and skills and the institutional support they received to adequately perform their roles. Some skills gaps in particular areas are specifically identified.

5.2 THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC MANAGER

In response to the first question on the interview schedule 'What are the main formal requirements of your role?' one respondent (No 6) declared:

> *There is a very well articulated document which floats around which talks about what a Head of School actually is…but in reality you are responsible for 'everything'(*author's emphasis) *and in the end, you could just say that*!

This very neatly sums up the reality of just how wide ranging the role of an academic manager is in practice, and the degree of accountability for their portfolios that respondents to this study felt in general.

However, beyond this, the overall intention of this research question was to determine the essential *elements* of the middle management role. The study was looking for reflections on how academic managers make sense of the seemingly bewildering demands that face them, the coping strategies they employ to reduce and make sense of this complexity. The respondents did indeed provide many insights into this, but not necessarily all neatly in response to the first question on the interview schedule.

Instead, these sorts of reflections tended to emerge as the interview progressed into greater detail (for example around the decisions they had to make, and the stakeholders they were responsible to) and, it is posited, as they gained confidence and trust in the interview process itself and started to see what it was really all about.

Johnson *et al* (2004) categorized the following different roles that an Executive Dean might be expected to play: "the dove of peace" (brokering between various warring factions), "the dragon" (keeping internal and external threats at bay), the "diplomat", the "translator" (of the goals of senior management to staff, and vice versa) and a "boundary person" (working at the interface of different groups).

A similar approach taken has been taken here, by searching through each respondent's transcript, and then trying to identify themes that emerged from the many anecdotal examples they gave of issues they were struggling with.

Some respondents definitely assisted in this task with neat descriptions of 'roles' that they found themselves having perforce to play e.g. "*the role I do play, and that's strange, I am like their mother, whatever problems they have got, I have got to sort them out*". In other cases the nature of the role has been inferred from the detail of what respondents said about *what* they do and *how* they do it.

The categories identified are presented below with supporting quotes.

5.2.1 The Quality Controller – Ensuring the quality of programmes and courses

This was a very clear theme and a high priority for all of the respondents. At the school and faculty level this is possibly the definitive and central role, many other responsibilities are seen to flow directly from this.

> *This is a professional faculty, most of our qualifications would be at an Honours level – which are all accredited by different kinds of bodies, professional bodies, peer groups whatever. The first thing is I must be knowledgeable enough to make sure that these happen properly.* (Respondent No 5)

Quality Control?- Ja..that is the key part of my job.. it is absolutely key.(Respondent No 4)

The primary concern is academic, ensuring our students get quality education, providing an environment in which that quality of education can take place.(Respondent No 1)

Much of what respondents did in their other roles ('Coordinating/Corralling/Team Building' 'Leading/Representing the interests of others'; 'Ensuring Compliance'; 'Positioning/Interfacing' 'Integrating/problem solving' and 'Ringing the changes') was seen by them as *necessary* to ensure this quality environment.

5.2.2 The Coordinator - Corralling and Team Building

The academic manager is key to ensuring that different individuals, units and departments work together to achieve the broader goals of the faculty and the wider institution. They need not only to be aware themselves of what everyone who reports to them is doing, but to ensure that different units are talking to each other and to step in and take corrective action where they perceive that individuals might not be acting in the best interests of the collective good. As the quotes below demonstrate, the respondents were acutely aware of their own accountability for ensuring this takes place.

Respondent No 4 had to ensure

that there are courses, there are programs, they are properly coordinated, … make sure that student issues are dealt with by the right people, make sure that staff know what is happening, exam boards and registrations for next year, progress reports on student research etc etc.. the buck stops with me!"

The reality of 'where the buck stops' for an Academic Manager introduces an element of coercion ('corralling') that is more than mere disinterested coordination. This was very clearly expressed by Respondent No 2

I have a meeting once a month with all heads of units…so I don't care if they don't need to talk to each other, or whatever! They must know that they are all part of this division and therefore there is a particular ethos, a particular end we are striving for, and there is a kind of shared understanding. They would never perhaps meet, but I have forced it on them!

Respondent No 5's authority was sometimes undermined by subordinates who were using their institutional knowledge and connections to bypass any decisions they did not like

for many years they have been allowed to do things…and when I have said ' No' they (the subordinates) *have always managed to take it one level higher*

This was undoubtedly a tricky issue requiring both patience and a firm hand

I got consensus, I had to build that, because they were continuously undermining me, going around…it was a long process but one had to structure things in a way that there is no other outcome. But now I have got all the management in one line, so there is no more 'going up'.

Ultimately respondents saw themselves as team leaders and responsible for ensuring shared values and goals within those teams and if that meant taking a strong stance, then so be it. As Respondent No 1 put it

Interest groupings among our academics are often at a loggerheads, competition for a particular resource, competition for recognition of roles, that kind of thing. One has to respond to the demand to make sure that everyone sings from the same hymn sheet and we recognise that there is a broader goal and objective that has brought us here, and that everyone's contribution is just as important as the other one.

5.2.3 The Academic Leader -Representing and defending the interests of others

To different degrees, all of the respondents saw themselves as leaders, as representatives in various fora of the interests of their colleagues, students, their school/unit or even the interests of the university as a whole.

At the school level, the leadership role was seen as needing to epitomise the core values of the academy i.e. leading by example. This was very clearly expressed by Respondent No 8, who said

In an academic environment I believe you really lead by setting an example. In other words if I require my staff to produce a certain amount of research, I must also be able to produce a certain amount of research.. if I am not participating in the academic process then I cannot really impose upon my staff to do so.

This philosophy was endorsed by Respondent No 6 who said

I have to lead from the front - so I have to be involved in teaching new courses etc. You cannot just sit back and be administrative!

On a broader level, the leadership role, in the context of this study, has been inferred from the responses obtained from academic managers, as ensuring that matters of vital interest to their constituencies passed through, and were fought for/defended as needed, in various decision making structures. The defining element of the leadership role has been understood/interpreted as where respondents saw themselves standing up in some way for the 'greater good', and being prepared to accept the consequences of this. As the following quotes demonstrate this may sometimes require holding onto the strength of one's convictions in the face of opposition and even personal humiliation and ridicule

Ultimately as XXX you have to show leadership and nail your colours to the mast. If you feel that one group unfairly demands what is not realistic, one has to be very candid and say that this is not who we are, that is not what XXX is about, this is the damage it will cause…and this happens from time to time. You have a few scorns and ridicule – this job is not about being popular (Respondent No 1).

I am the only member of XXX that ever speaks at X committee, because the other three have been subdued into silence - because you get seriously ridiculed by senior management. Like, you make a statement and one of the DVCs will say 'Well, what Prof X is actually trying to say, but he/she is unable to articulate' or ' Prof X does not understand the financials of this university, he/she will never understand the government subsidy formula for this university'. So sometimes I have to be forceful (they don't like that) and then you have exposed X in public and he has lost face (Respondent No 3).

5.2.4 The Bureaucrat - Ensuring compliance with rules and regulations

All respondents felt that they had a duty to ensure compliance with the university's rules, regulations and procedures. The following responses are indicative of the all pervasive influence of university structures and regulations and the way respondents accepted this as an absolutely integral part of their world.

F*irstly there are university policies and rules and regulations and your decision is guided by that* (Respondent No 1).

Policy is <u>there</u>. The university policies are in most cases very good (except for the X policy which is not working!)(Respondent No 3)

I am quite strong on procedure, some people get very irritated with me, you have to follow procedure because the procedure is there actually to make sure that no-one gets trampled on, stood on, exploited…. although some procedures are exploitative! (Respondent No 4)

What is being inferred here is that there was an implicit understanding and acceptance by everyone interviewed, that some things 'are as they are' and this applied particularly to the institutional structures. Participants did not really challenge them or question them, they either worked with them or around them, and in doing this they actively upheld and reinforced their legitimacy and permanency.

This seems a very interesting, and perhaps, contradictory finding in light of the fact that respondents also generally identified 'red tape' and 'bureaucracy' as one of the chief frustrations they experienced in carrying out their roles (see 5.5.3.2 below). On the face of it this seems that the academic managers interviewed have somewhat selective lenses through which they view the university bureaucracy. It would seem, from the comments received, that they like and support the idea of consistency, fairness and safety that 'the system' offers, but resent its inflexibility and

slowness, particularly when it directly impacts on them. Furthermore, when this happens, what the system delivers is suddenly no longer impersonal, but more likely to be the direct result of someone's 'incompetence' or 'top-down managerialism'.

5.2.5 The Boundary Keeper - Positioning/Interfacing with the outside world

This role of boundary keeper is derived from the perceptions of respondents of an inherent responsibility to situate/position their faculty/school/function to the best possible advantage with external stakeholders.

Respondent No 5 was able to build relationships with a large parastatal, the local municipality and a large private operator around a multidisciplinary research project, while also involving central government. The key to this was

> *because we all have a common vision of where we have to go …so what our role becomes is a facilitator between industry and government – it is very interesting, I enjoy it – we are neutral, we don't have any specific allegiances to anyone - we have to satisfy everyone's needs.*

The academic manager also operates on the perceived boundary between management and staff. This can be tricky, requiring the delicate skills of diplomacy and mediation to achieve a result that will satisfy the expectations of both groups.

> *You have got to implement what management wants you to do but you also have to bring the concerns, or whatever, from the staff to management and sometimes it is not easy to do exactly what management want you to do because of the nature of what you have got to do …so one has to negotiate as to what is the appropriate thing to do, that will achieve the same outcome* (Respondent No 5)*.*

5.2.6 The Integrator/Problem Solver – making sure things work

The essence of this is adaptability and institutional knowledge, bringing disjointed things together so that they work, and creatively using positional knowledge to eliminate duplication and inefficiency.

The academic manager emerges as the lubricant to grease the wheels of a sometimes slow and cranky administration, or to ensure smooth relations with other units. Respondent No 8 summarised this succinctly

> *In a nutshell, the role of a Head of School is to make everything appear to work perfectly!*

By this the respondent meant that the Head of School needs to step in quickly when things are not working and do whatever is necessary, make a quick telephone call, speak directly to the Head of another unit, whatever, to get things moving again, with the result that

The interesting thing is, it always works - the staff are left with the impression things are working.

Being able to do this requires institutional knowledge, knowing where to go to, and who to contact when things go wrong, as Respondent No 4 put it

There are issues, there are problems, things that go wrong.. but when things go wrong in my arena I deal with them. I know how to deal with them, I take them to the right places and sort them out.

Respondent No 5 had observed that, when it came to making decisions about purchasing capital equipment, some managers did not talk to each other. The result was that the same, or very similar, items of equipment were often on the proposed capital expenditure lists of more than one department. Respondent No 5 was able to bring the managers together and agree to share, with the result that a far broader and more varied range of equipment was available, on a shared basis, to all the departments. Reflecting on this Respondent No 5 said

I see myself as' integrating' at this stage.

5.2.7 The Ringer of Changes

Finally, as the literature review has demonstrated, there have been massive changes in higher education globally, nationally and locally. In this sea of change, it is perhaps inevitable that the academic manager needs to act as the harbinger, or agent of change.

All respondents recognised the reality of change and were able to quote numerous examples where changes in the wider world had impacted on the reality of their day to day working environments. The reality of their leadership positions however demanded not only personal acceptance of change, but getting others to recognise and deal with it too.

The big challenge that faces any academic manager is dealing with change and forcing (er.. helping!) staff to recognise that change is inevitable. So 'Yeah, we can go back to 350 students, and we would have to sack half the staff!' - but the class size is NOT going to go down to 25 (thank you very much) any more. (Respondent No 6)

5.3 STAKEHOLDERS

This section attempts to give insights into some of the key stakeholders mentioned by respondents and the influence they can exert. No attempt is made to discuss in detail ALL of the various stakeholders mentioned by respondents, nor to calibrate in any way their relative influence. The

influence of various stakeholders is discussed in a number of contexts throughout Chapter 5 and is not purely limited to the discussion that follows.

The underlying objective here was to gain more nuanced understandings by exploring the influence of stakeholders and their influence on respondents' roles as Academic Managers.

5.3.1 External stakeholders

External stakeholders, for the purposes of this study, were taken as being influential organizations or groupings operating outside of the formal staffing structure of the university. From this perspective students are discussed as 'external stakeholders', this view is analogous to treating customers as being external stakeholders in a corporate setting.

5.3.1.1 Government (both National and Provincial)

Various Government Departments (at both the National and Provincial Level) were cited as having considerable influence on the roles of the more senior respondents (Head of School upwards). As the principal funder and regulator, Government was seen to be able to determine both the overall financial viability of the institution and various activities within it, and to determine the regulatory and governance environment within which the institution has to operate.

Engagement with government ranged from ensuring day to day compliance, to the difficulties encountered in trying to accommodate ad hoc requests, to the frustrations experienced with unrealistic expectations expressed by some senior government officials:

> *My office engages with most Government departments in some way or the other .We upload all data that has to be provided, we provide the Department with the annual reports etc. In terms of compliance my office engages on a constant basis* (Respondent No 2).

> *We often get requests from Province and Government to do all kinds of things – either research projects or they want us to do a specific programme. You look at it and say 'Well no - actually it does not belong at Wits, it belongs at a technical college'. Government often don't understand how Wits works!* (Respondent No 5)

> *They still do not understand that the whole country cannot produce xxx number of Y graduates in a year (the national target). We have explained to the Minister very carefully about the pipeline, the infrastructure and the amount of staff, all these things…it is totally unrealistic, the whole country currently only produces x! It will take about ten years but they want it now*!

Apart from the frustrations mentioned above, this study did not pick up any significant tensions or problems in handling the day to day interface with government. Respondents who had to deal with government seemed to have a fairly positive view

> *We are building relationships with the Province, which has increased quite a bit over the last few years. It is very important that they know what we do and we support them to achieve what they want to achieve.* (Respondent No 5)

5.3.1.2 Other Funders/Research partners

In the South African context, where government funding, as a proportion of the total funding that universities receive, has consistently declined in recent years, so called 'third stream' income has assumed greater and greater importance, as Respondent No 1 attested

> *We would not maintain the current level of staff and service without generating third stream income.*

Respondent No 7 pointed out that Wits has been very successful in this regard

> *Of all the universities in the country Wits has the greatest proportion of third stream income coming from industries…we are very, very thoroughly embedded in mining, in engineering etc -so we have those linkages.*

There is however a caveat; third stream income, particularly from commercial sources does not come without strings attached, and it often falls to the Academic manager to maintain a balanced and mutually beneficial relationship. The key, it would seem, is to listen to stakeholders and accommodate their demands where possible, but without compromising the integrity of programmes and courses

> *So part of my business is to keep a very close relationship with all the captains of industry -to make sure we know what their needs are. <u>We don't just do what they want</u>* (author's emphasis) *– we consider what their needs are, and accommodate them as much as possible – they are our major stakeholders*. (Respondent No 5)

5.3.1.3 Professional Associations/Accreditation Boards/Regulatory bodies

Respondents from professional schools and faculties cited the importance of maintaining relations with various professional bodies and accreditation boards. It is usually impossible to completely satisfy the demands and needs of all these various boards, and this can leave the academic manager with a dilemma, clearly articulated by Respondent No 6

> *In some respects they come with particular agendas and you have to decide are you going to deliver <u>what you think they want</u> or <u>what you decide they need?"</u>*(author's emphasis)

Some can be very demanding, and not all of them keep up with the times

You get some very, very dogmatic views on quality, as to how graduates should be, what they should be taught and so on 'This is what I was taught when I did it' (25 years ago) and 'Hey! You don't teach this stuff anymore – why not?'… Er, well….. the world has changed! (Respondent No 6)

5.3.1.4 The public at large (including NGOs, various communities, other universities, parents and alumni)

This is a huge 'catch all' category, however one or two stories are of interest in relation to themes that have already been noted. Respondent No 8 commented that he/she had noticed

The other thing that has changed dramatically over the last ten years is the number of parents I get in my office telling me their child deserves to pass or to be promoted…

He/she quoted a specific example where a parent could not understand why their child had not been granted admission to the first year. On discussion it emerged that the parent was convinced that this must be due to the application of some form of quota system. When Respondent No 8 responded that the school had received over 1000 applications for 250 places and that admission had been granted solely in order of merit

This person was horrified! she said 'Do you mean that everyone else who got in, had better marks than my son?' Yes, absolutely…not only that, but I can show you!

The youngster in question went off and got better grades for his matric, and was then successfully admitted the following year. The point of this story was that in his entire tenure as Head of School, Respondent No 8 claimed to have never had an adverse reaction from parents if the system was explained to them, and they were shown that their offspring had been given fair treatment.

The sheer complexity of multiple stakeholder involvement and potential conflicts of interest in high profile public projects was highlighted by Respondent No 7, who described the role of the university in relation to the paleoanthropological work out in the Cradle of Humankind in the Magaliesberg area.

The site is on private land and we want to go and do things on that land, we want to dig holes in the ground, measure things, keep holes open, sometimes for years! As we painstakingly work our way through and try to understand the story of palaeoanthropology and paleo climates etc. The land owners have interests in that they might want to use the land for something else, they have security issues, they don't want to have strange people tramping all over their land!. Government has an interest because Government owns everything below the surface, so all the fossils that are found automatically belong to the State….

In this example not only are there multiple external stakeholders, but even the university itself cannot be considered as simply having one homogeneous set of interests. As Respondent No 7 went

on to explain, whilst the primary concern of senior management at the university might be an issue such as reputation or risk management or contractual integrity, this could well be at odds with the aims of some of the university's scientists who might simply want maximum flexibility to fully explore all the scientific and research possibilities.

In such situations it can be extremely complex and difficult to respect and protect the interests of all the parties involved. Obviously there is often a huge role for the Legal Office in drawing up contracts, but more importantly in the eyes of this respondent

> *There is the value of trust the personal relationships* (author's emphasis)*that had been built up between individuals was enormously important in helping us to re-negotiate and have a flexible evolving relationship around something that is emergent and changing. It is about adaptation.*

5.3.1.5 Students

All respondents emphasized the importance, indeed the centrality, of a concern for students in determining and shaping their day to day, and long term agendas. This was perhaps best summarized by Respondent No 8 who said

> *I had an open door policy for my students -any student can see me any time. I wanted to be respected by my students and I wanted to show that we genuinely cared as a staff, so I had to set that example. They are not the irritation, they are the reason we exist.*

Numerous examples were quoted where respondents went out of their way to accommodate the interests of students. In the context of this study it is perhaps interesting to reflect that it seemed that if the issue involved students this would be where respondents were really prepared to go out on a limb, or bend the rules. Two of the respondents had been involved in tirelessly pursuing an issue to do with student fees (where they felt a certain category of student was being treated unfairly) through numerous committees over a period of several months to the point where there had been an open confrontation with a member of senior management. Another, faced with having to discipline a student who had broken the rules, rather than suspending or expelling the culprit, 'sentenced' him to preparing a presentation to his classmates and lecturers on the importance of observing university regulations.

The responsibility of educating, training and shaping the next generation does seem to get towards the core of what drives and motivates many academics, even after they move into more managerial modes. One Head of School, working in a professional environment where most of his/her staff could easily get jobs in industry at far higher remuneration levels expressed his/her feelings thus

What we are doing here, in my opinion, is making the best contribution to the economy of this country that we can possibly make and that is create youngsters who will build this economy, and it is very hard to do that and the pressures are inordinate. (Respondent No 8)

5.3.2 Internal stakeholders

The principal internal stakeholders identified by respondents were superiors, colleagues, administration/central services and the institution as a whole. Much, in fact the bulk, of this study explores these relationships from many different angles and therefore they are merely noted here.

5.4 DECISION MAKING

The interview schedule contained a number of very specific questions around decision making (refer to Appendix A).

The aim was to get a sense of the degree of collaboration/consultation on various types of decisions. In a typical corporate line management structure considerable decision making power is typically vested in individuals, with the magnitude and range of decision making power increasing progressively up the line to the Chief Executive Officer to whom ultimate control and authority over the company's affairs are delegated by the Board. If universities are indeed becoming more 'managerialist' one might expect perhaps to see evidence of power being wrested back from committees and a generally more autocratic decision making culture emerging.

This study did not find much evidence of this. The first thing to report is that all respondents had a very clear picture of the formal institutional decision making structures, particularly those that impinged directly on their areas

All faculty decisions go to a higher level of authority. <u>It is the way</u> (author's emphasis) *...I mean Council has council committees and then Senate has Senate committees, the most important one is Faculty Board. Every Faculty has a Faculty Board and all sub committees of the Faculty Board have to report to Board, the Board has to report to Senate - so it is a multi-level hierarchical decision making system.*(Respondent No 3)

So essentially you operate within a consensus decision making model and of course attempting to achieve consensus, but noting that Senate and Council are the two decision making bodies of the university, and we operate within those, so we can recommend, <u>but we all operate within the rules and guidelines that govern us</u> (author's emphasis). (Respondent No 2)

Respondents emphasized that, at the school and faculty level, there was considerable autonomy. For example, Respondent No 4 stated

We have to have a level of autonomy and you have to be able to structure stuff into your courses and decide how to teach it and decide what research you are going to do and what to do with the findings.

Two of the respondents, who had extensive experience from outside of Wits, commented that the degree of autonomy allowed at Wits is in fact exceptional in the South African context:

> *I would say Wits allows greater independence than other universities I have worked in …which may surprise an awful lot of people! They would be gobsmacked at the level of controls that actually exist elsewhere!* (Respondent No 6)

> *I came from a very Afrikaans University, very different environment, very structured, no way you disobey the rules…..*

However autonomy was not seen as a license to make autocratic decisions, respondents continually emphasized the need to consult and to be accountable for their actions

> *It has to be an accountable autonomy* (author's emphasis) *you have to be able to account for what you have done and say I did this, this and this for this reason…there has to a culture of debate, discussion, it is a rational institution …that is the bottom line* (Respondent No 4)

> *I always go back to ask 'So tell me about this?' - I do not want to undermine my subordinates, if you have an issue 'let's talk about it'. In the end I have to make decisions about budget and people and whatever, but I do it with advice* (author's emphasis). (Respondent No 5)

Whilst some comments did emerge around perceived autocratic tendencies among some senior management (See 5.5.3.4 below), all the respondents interviewed were at pains to emphasize both the breadth and depth of consultation they personally undertook before making any truly important decisions.

5.5 ROLE CONFLICT

Given the many pressures they faced and the conflicting demands placed on them by different stakeholders, it was postulated that respondents would experience some levels of role conflict and ambiguity. The interview schedule specifically asked respondents to describe the types of decisions they found most difficult to make, to recall incidents where they were called upon to resolve clashes of interests between different stakeholders, and to describe how they experienced these situations.

Based on the responses obtained, this section briefly examines two types of conflict reported as being commonly experienced by respondents. Firstly the conflict experienced by academic managers (mainly at the Head of School level) between the perceived need to continue with teaching and research and, at the same time, carry out their managerial duties; and secondly the conflict experienced by all respondents (albeit in different ways) between competing demands and in situations where they had to make difficult or unpopular decisions.

Finally, a summary of what respondents identified as the principal sources of the frustration they experienced in different situations, why they experienced this and how they coped with it, is presented.

In all instances, insights into the coping strategies adopted by respondents in dealing with such challenges are also provided. This is in addition to section 5.5 'Coping Strategies' which attempts to identify some overall strategies adopted, at a more macro level.

5.5.1Teaching and Research Loads

As highlighted earlier, at the School level there is considerable perceived pressure to continue to make visible contributions to both teaching and research. Whether this arises as a result of a genuine shortage of resources, or is perhaps more self-imposed, is open to debate. What did emerge strongly from all respondents at the Head/Deputy Head of School level, was that they all seemed to feel an obligation to carry more than their 'fair' share of teaching and research, and somehow fit in the administrative/managerial demands around this, for example:

> *When we decentralised the deal was that Heads of School would relinquish their teaching roles and get extra staff positions – well that never happened. In fact I carried a full teaching load, so I took a whole first year class, I took a 4th year class, I took post grad courses and I supervised multiple students. So we checked, and my workload was the same as any other professor, excluding my Head of School commitments!* (Respondent No 8)

Balancing these demands did cause role conflict for some:

> *I am in the prime of my research, got a good number of PHD students, got a good research project- it is moving, I keep on finding things, I can take on a new project, I can take it to scale and people of my age and stage of career are actually at that point..but we are the people who are being called upon to run the university.* (Respondent No 4)

The most common coping response, among respondents still carrying substantial teaching and research loads, was to work very long hours.

5.5.2 Difficult Decisions and Competing Demands

Generally decisions were perceived as difficult where the issue was not clear cut and, whilst the respondent felt obliged by their role to resolve it, they were being tugged in different directions.

Respondent No 2 gave an example of where the student leadership had placed a document in her hands to be tabled at Council, but it was already too late and in any case such a document should normally go to the Legal Office first. Should she simply just tell them that they had missed the boat? But what would the fall-out be?? In the end she decided to see if she could negotiate for the

students to come to the next meeting and speak to the issue, but that the document itself would only be tabled at the following meeting.

Respondent No 5 was grappling with the problem of an academic who was an excellent researcher but who had achieved this at the expense of almost completely ignoring his teaching and admin responsibilities. On one level he definitely deserved promotion, as increasing the quality and quantity of research output is seen as key to achieving the university's '2022 Vision'. Yet what kind of a precedent would this set for his colleagues? (Many of them would also like to just drop their teaching/admin responsibilities and get promoted into the bargain).

In both the above cases respondents stressed the importance of '*sounding out*' colleagues, informally going around and testing the waters to get an idea of other people's opinions and what the likely reactions or 'fall out' would be.

> *I will never, ever finalise what should be happening without listening to my colleagues.. you have to be able to listen and take a range of perspectives into account in order to make the best decision for students and colleagues.* (Respondent No 5)

Several respondents alluded to the importance of having a 'safe zone' – a group of senior colleagues whom you know you can bounce ideas and problems off first…and it will go no further.

Paradoxically the issues most frequently being cited as 'hardest' to deal with, were all the so called 'soft' issues around having to deal with people. The responsibility of their roles places academic managers in situations where they have to make decisions that will affect other people's lives. One respondent, with over ten years experience in his role, put it thus

> *Well at the end of the day, you know, I just wish I understood people better*! (Respondent No 8)

Inevitably, it seems, academic managers find themselves embroiled in conflict ridden situations where they are expected to play the role of arbiter, and it is not always possible to resolve such situations with all parties walking away satisfied

> *So the student is complaining about the supervisor, the supervisor is complaining about the student, and I have to find a solution which makes both of them walk out of here feeling that they have sorted out the problem!.... either they will talk to each other and continue working or they will separate - and I have not yet worked out that one to be honest with you.* (Respondent No 4)

It would be naïve to assume there are any simple answers here, but this was a subject that all respondents had to deal with and to which many obviously had devoted considerable thought and

reflection. Respondent No 5, who had obviously thought carefully about it, employed a strategy which the respondent labeled 'management of expectations' and described it thus

> *It is often around the management of expectations, rather than conflict…one has to listen carefully to 'What are these expectations about?' What do they <u>really</u> want and what are they saying? Once you know that - you know how to advise.*

Respondent No 8 counseled

> *Sometimes you realise that the way you say things and the nuance is so important. I have had to learn 'Shut your mouth and listen first!' and only then try to make that wise comment, as opposed to jumping in boots and all, saying 'Let me fix this!'*

5.5.3 Sources of Frustration

The study revealed many sources of frustration for academic managers arising variously from their workloads, contradictions in their roles, pressures and demands from various stakeholders and perceptions of a lack of support/accountability from various quarters. Frustration seemed to be most acutely experienced when things did not work, or did not work on time, and when respondents felt that they were not being listened to by their subordinates, colleagues or superiors.

Some evidence of this has already been presented, and more emerges throughout the further discussions that follow this section. This section looks at the main sources of frustration that emerged and some of the ways that respondents found to deal with it.

5.5.3.1 Subordinates

Amongst the respondents interviewed frustration appeared to be most acutely experienced when having to deal with a perceived lack of initiative, or the perceived incompetence of subordinates. Several respondents seemed overwhelmed by their feelings, unable to clearly articulate their thoughts and struggled for words when asked to give examples of such situations.

> *It is like so obvious..I am like..'Why didn't you check?.. How can you send this document??'...I have to re-do it, or I have to send it back 'there is a mistake here, here, here! - find it and correct it!' …so I have to send it again, it comes back ..AAgh! Pulling teeth, pulling teeth!* (Respondent No 4)

> *I have spent my morning telling a particular staff member that she needs to do something, so she tells me 'I have sent an email and I have had no response'. So I said 'Well, try sms!'..so she sent an sms, and the person still has not responded, and it is a very important issue, so my irritation is- Why do you need <u>me</u> to tell you? - 'Dial the person on their landline at home!...so why do I even have to tell you this ??'* (Respondent No 2)

Beyond formal HR processes, respondents were left with two principal coping strategies. Either attempt to personally mentor/coach the individual, or 'do it yourself'.

The mentoring approach requires patience, is inevitably time consuming, but can produce results as Respondent No 8 reported

> *On the admin side we have had admin folk who were just completely and utterly incompetent.*

This usually placed him/her in the invidious position of having to resolve the situation. His/her approach was always to take the time to talk to the individual and try to understand where they were 'at'. Invariably he/she found that when a person is generally perceived by their colleagues to be out of their depth, they themselves are aware of it and are far from happy. He/she went on to describe one particular instance of an individual who was clearly not coping in the finance section

> *I supported that person to get training in another area, and that person became very successful. I saw them the other day, and they think I am a hero!*

But when the time and effort seem too much, perhaps 'do it yourself' is less stressful?

> *That person would not have the savvy to think through why I went to XX last week, so I would have to dictate why I went to XX last week, instead of just writing it myself- might as well just write it myself.* (Respondent No 3)

5.5.3.2 Bureaucracy and Red Tape

Respondents cited numerous examples of the frustrations they experienced with the apparent inflexibility or slowness of the bureaucratic system and many of these are quoted throughout these findings. Here are some illustrative examples.

> *We have made endless recommendations to XXX office on how to change XXX award system at this university -which would really facilitate the post grad training. But for seven years they haven't done anything about it! – they haven't even increased the XXX percentage, which they were supposed to do annually…so those kind of things are really frustrating*. (Respondent No 3)

> *The problem is that throughout the system there are always folk who find a problem, and instead of coming back to you and saying 'listen I found this issue and I need you to clarify' it would end up in an obscure pile somewhere! …a clerk somewhere stopping everything you want done- that is remarkably frustrating!* (Respondent No 8)

In earlier discussions it was highlighted that, in general, respondents were very supportive of the university's bureaucratic system in terms of providing fairness, certainty and the opportunity to take into account a wide range of views in the way decisions are made and implemented. The frustration here seems to emanate from the inefficiency of the system *in practice*, rather than any fundamental disagreement with the need for a bureaucratic system *per se*.

Respondent No 6 took a far more sanguine view. When specifically asked why he/she did not seem to encounter the same levels of frustration and difficulty in dealing with the university administration as reported by some other colleagues, the response was

> *Yes, but that is because they don't really understand issues around the Governance structures, for example, issues around procurement, the PFMA etc. They are there for a reason, you need to understand why the systems are established the way that they are.*

He/she went on to illustrate with an example in his/her own faculty when academics might complain that they had to fill in forms and submit receipts and that all this was pointless – did he/she not *know* that they were honest? Did he/she not trust them? And his/her view was that personal honesty and trust can work in a small business employing two or three people, but in an organisation the size of a university that just becomes impossible.

> *There is always stuff where you think, well it could be done better this way, or whatever, but the reality is, it is a bureaucracy, it has to be a bureaucracy, it can't be run as a 'happy family'!* (author's emphasis)

5.5.3.3 Colleagues

Although strong affiliation with, and respect for academic colleagues clearly emerged in all the interviews conducted, they can also be 'difficult' and a source of frustration. This seems to highlight the reality that the management element of the role means that the academic manager has to be more than just a colleague. Perhaps people's somewhat idiosyncratic demands and egos are of little consequence, even a source of amusement, when they are merely colleagues, but it is a different matter when these idiosyncrasies get in the way of management's plans.

Respondent No 4 had difficulties dealing with colleagues who did not follow the academic norms of engaging in reasoned debate and accepting the will of the majority

> *You know the things I find most difficult to deal with are difficult people (some people might think I am difficult!) But it is people who won't listen to reason, because they are defending their own interests. That is because I want to be reasonable, I want to have a discussion and a debate. When people don't want to do that, or when people want to change their positions -I can't follow them, or work out who they are!*

Respondent No 5 clearly felt that colleagues who choose to ignore such academic norms create conflict and place the rest of their colleagues at risk

> *Some academics think they are extremely important and they follow no policy, nothing, and that creates conflict immediately. One therefore tries to get them to do the right thing, within the limitations that we've got, and not put us at risk."*

The root of the perceived problem seems to be the 'academic ego'. Respondent No 6 seemed to accept this as inevitable, but none the less difficult to deal with

> *Well by definition every academic has to have a big ego, to actually 'profess' you have to have an ego… so we have big egos. So that is the most difficult thing to deal with, is the people actually*.

In dealing with difficulties with colleagues, ultimately the academic manager finds him/herself in a position that he/she has to step in and make a decision that they see as being in the interests of the collective good. This was again clearly expressed by Respondent No 5

> *For me it is about the risk that we take … if your way of doing things then becomes a risk to either the faculty or the university, then we have got to either stop it or find a way to do it differently.*

Respondent No 4 was also prepared to take a firm line with colleagues

> *I am willing to say to someone 'You need to be at that meeting'…that is where I start parting ways with many of my colleagues, because they do not like to be told that, but I am willing to say,' if we are doing this thing together-you have to be there. If you are not there then OK, that is fine, but then don't come and disrupt things three weeks later when a decision has been taken'.*

5.5.3.4 Superiors

Finally, senior management were also frequently cited as a source of frustration by respondents.

One respondent said that a considerable source of frustration was indecision by senior management. This, she argued, stemmed from the fact that, in her view, the senior management of the institution did <u>not</u> regard themselves as decision makers, rather

> *They believe that they act on the decisions made by Senate and the committees of Senate and Council; so the Senate and the Council are the decision makers and the senior management role is implementation of decisions.*

But that this becomes terribly frustrating, and produces circular reasoning

> *When you suggest that they have not made a decision quickly enough, they will say they are not the decision makers!.... which then causes a great deal of anxiety, because they then turn that back to the people that have complained, and say 'You advised us dot, dot, dot - we are trying to implement it dot, dot, dot - it is beyond our ability to implement it. You need to go back to the drawing board and advise us differently.'*

On the other hand, when top management does act decisively, this is can be seen as authoritarian and 'not listening'. In this view senior management are seen to pursue their own agenda and be very selective about what they choose to listen to, and what they ignore.

> *Five of us sat there saying this is a problem, and the XXX DVC was just not interested.. did not want to know about it, did not want to hear about it, I mean!… it was appalling.*

> *Even though we have all these committees feeding one into the other, it is actually not consultation.eg: the big discussion about XXX - that was a top down process, and they do not listen, the management at the university does not listen to us. It is super- managerialism! – 'We have decided this is the right way to go!' and when you make inputs-they still just go their way.*

The perception that senior management is somehow removed and distant and either does not understand, or does not care, about the problems 'at the chalkface' can be experienced as very disillusioning and frustrating.

> *I think there is no listening, they are not willing to listen, they don't care. There is no sense that it is a caring institution, like why should I have to fight with XXX DVC that the XXX students are being poorly treated? Why am I fighting with him? Why is it a fight?*

So how did respondents deal with situations where senior management appeared to be on a very different path to their own?

Two principle strategies seem to emerge from the responses obtained in this study, either , what the author has named ,'Stop resisting and just accept it' or 'Ignore it and do your own thing' anyway. The first approach is apparent in the first two quotes below and the second approach in the last quote.

> *So we do things by consensus, but <u>often it is by forced consensus</u>* (author's emphasis)*…if they don't get their way, then they shout at you*!

> *I am the only member of XXX that ever speaks at X committee, because the other three have been subdued into silence.*

> *In the meantime the university has now published a new research strategy, which is fantastic, but the basic premise of the funding model is wrong, and I have showed this to them every time they have discussed this, but they just ignore me –whatever! - I'll do my own thing.*

5.6 COPING STRATEGIES

Although there are obviously many and varied ways in which individual academic managers respond to the demands placed on them, and some strategies may work better for some individuals or in

specific situations, four broad strategies derived from the interview data have been identified. These would seem to have some general applicability in this environment and are discussed below with illuminating examples.

5.6.1 Time Management

An obvious response to the multiplicity of demands is to manage one's time better, the immediate casualty of this is often individual teaching and/or research (as described earlier).

Respondent No 3 organised her life this way

> *So the only way I manage this is I have an old fashioned writing in diary, and I do everything when I am supposed to do it. If the time is finished for that activity, that activity is finished, what does not get finished is done well enough within the time that I allocate to it.*

But the majority of respondents just seem to end up working longer hours

> *It means you work after hours and at weekends, but it really isn't a problem because you tend to be quite driven.* (Respondent No 8)

5.6.2 Continuous Learning

All respondents seemed to regard their jobs as a continuous learning cycle. This was demonstrated by reference to different courses they either had attended, or intended to take, and evidence of experiential learning in the reflections of respondents on how they perceived the importance of learning throughout their careers.

> *I have learnt everything from bottom up. I never took a role three steps up if I thought I was not ready..in that way one understands the roles and responsibilities, and the impossibilities, and what could be, and how one can develop the possibilities.* (Respondent No 5)

> *I think I can do that well for my level ..if I was going higher then I would have to learn it at that level, I am a good learner, I would learn it.* (Respondent No 4)

5.6.3 Working the System

Much emerged in this study around issues of structure, bureaucracy and various policies, rules and regulations. Participants respect the system and have to work within it, but much can often be achieved by also working *around* it.

> *Policy is there to guide you, but if it is really in your way, there are always ways to do things.*

Perhaps the key strategy, and one which was emphasised by a number of respondents is to develop a close network of key people, either within or closely linked to your immediate working area, to whom you can either delegate or refer matters:

The trick is to make sure you have really, really good people working with you. (Respondent No 8)

A*t faculty level we have outstanding people-they are really good! They are really good at overcoming obstacles-they can do anything at the faculty level.* (Respondent No 3)

The trick is the ability to identify existing capacities within the school and mobilise them to do what you cannot possibly do yourself. (Respondent No 1)

5.6.4 Working collaboratively

Respondents in this study did not, unless specifically prompted by the interviewer, talk much about the concept of colleagialism, other than to perhaps refer to it as a somewhat over-romanticised notion about a state of affairs that may, or may not, have existed in the past. However, without exception, they all talked about the need to work collaboratively and the need to 'sound things out' before making important decisions.

The collaborative approach emerged more as a pragmatic response to the environment in which academic managers have to work, where the problems are multi-faceted, and there are many different stakeholders and interest groupings, than as something ultimately driven by a sense of loyalty and belonging to an 'Academe'. Collaboration in this context seems to be *wider* than colleagialism (because it draws in all stakeholders and not just fellow academics). It seems to exist firstly because it is *necessary,* to get things done, to work through and around the system, secondly because it is a *deeply ingrained ethic* (and this may in fact be the lasting legacy of collegialism) and ultimately to ensure that what you do is supported by your subordinates, colleagues and superiors (who generally share this same ethic).

Respondent No 4 expressed it thus:

Firstly my approach is collaborative. I work collaboratively up, and I work collaboratively down. OK, so any decision I make, I very, very rarely make it on my own ….and I do it for a number of reasons. I do it firstly because I think you make better decisions when you consult and I don't want to take a decision and then have someone say 'No!' or overrule me. So if I think there might be a disagreement, I will definitely consult so that we thrash out the issues and we make a combined decision.

5.7 PREPAREDNESS AND SKILLS GAPS

The literature, and indeed some of the researcher's own anecdotal experience of talking to academic managers who had attended various courses either organized by HESA or SARUA, supports the view that many people with purely academic backgrounds may initially find themselves ill-equipped to deal with some of the new demands placed on them when they are promoted into the management ranks. The third section of the interview schedule therefore concentrated on eliciting responses,

both generally and in various specific areas, as to participants' level of preparedness and the support available to them. Most of the responses in this section are very specific to Wits University and may have little applicability beyond this context.

5.7.1 Background and previous experience

This section discusses respondents' perceptions of their preparedness for the rigours of a managerial role, when they first assumed their positions.

Socialisation into the institution, developing institutional knowledge and ultimately internalising the accepted norms and practices emerged as a strong theme here. Most respondents had worked their way up through internal promotions at Wits and, on the whole, these respondents considered this a very good background and a natural progression.

> *I have been at Wits forever! I was a student here, so things have evolved naturally. I have done leadership courses, I have done full, year- long courses, for example in the application of the labour law.* (Respondent No 3)

These sentiments were echoed by Respondent No 4 who said:

> *I have been here a long time, I have built up and I have co-ordinated basically every programme in the school - so I have stepped up, and it has completely prepared me.*

This respondent went on to emphasize the importance of institutional knowledge

> *I have an institutional sense that very few people have. We were having a debate in our division the other day about why a certain course was prepared a certain way, and I remembered the discussion and the debates that we had (long ago) and why we chose it that way. Sometimes I am the only person in the room who remembers why, or how, something happened. So - Yes, I was adequately prepared, and I think I have the qualities to deal with some of the difficulties.*

Lack of this institutional knowledge can be a severe obstacle to newcomers. It appears that much of what happens, and how things are actually done in practice, becomes implicit and is no longer questioned or explained to the uninitiated – it is just how things 'are'. This was highlighted as a major obstacle he/she had to overcome, by one of only two respondents who had come directly into a management role at Wits from the outside.

> *I think I was ready for some of the big, big stuff... but all the routine, and day to day dealing with faculties etc! I have had to learn how the university is structured, what are the committees and how does each committee fit into each other. Understanding the context has taken me about a year.* (Respondent No 2)

Only two of the respondents expressed any real concerns about their readiness for a management

role at the time they were promoted. It was clear that in both these cases the experience was quite daunting.

> *I don't think my background prepared me for all of this! I understand academics and the challenges that they confront, issues of quality assurance and ensuring our students receive high end education, but I did not receive training for example on issues around HR and labour relations, and how to resolve conflict. Nothing prepared me for these kinds of challenges and decisions about people's future.* (Respondent No 1)

> *When I became the Head of School, I literally was terrified, I didn't know a thing, and I had to learn it all! I remember this feeling (for probably the first five years of my tenure), that I have literally no idea of what I am doing, and hoping that nobody spots it!* (Respondent No 8)

The latter respondent was ultimately successful, and in fact was appointed to a second five year term, but averred that this was almost entirely due to his/her own efforts

> *I learnt by running around and talking to people - business managers, finance and HR….I believe in processes so, once I learnt it, I said 'How do I make my processes map into that?' and after that, things began to work.*

5.7.2 Perceptions of preparedness and skills gaps in specific areas

The interview schedule (refer to Appendix A) then asked respondents to specifically talk about their preparedness and knowledge in the following areas: Managing, motivating and leading people; Financial Management, ITC, Quality Control, Strategic Planning and Policy Formulation and Implementation. The key responses under each of these are presented below.

5.7.2.1 Managing, motivating and leading people

All respondents saw this as a critical skill, and essential to any leadership or management role.

> *Managing, motivating and leading people? Oh you need that! You definitely need that!"* (Respondent No 2)

> *Definitely managing and motivating people - there is no doubt about that! And I think I have some skills in it, though I am sure I could get better.* (Respondent No 4)

The importance and value of formal training courses in this area was emphasized

> *I did a* (management development*) programme at Wits, which I found very rewarding, not so much for what I learned about management, but what I learned about myself, and I think that was hugely important*. (Respondent No 5)

> *I had to buy books on it! ..like a book on leadership .Now for some people it comes naturally, but for others you have to say 'Well, what does it mean to be a good leader*?' (Respondent No 8)

5.7.2.2 Financial Management

The responses to this were mixed. Some respondents did see this as very important, but the level of financial knowledge required does seem to depend on the particular nature and level of the position. Respondent No 2 stated

> *You really do need to have quite a high level of finance skills as well. Your own division runs into millions of budget, all your separate little units….No 1 - you need to know that. If you cannot read the financial statements of your own university, you are a dead duck!*

At the School and Faculty level, respondents tended to emphasize the fact that specialist financial support is generally available, and that to one extent or another, over the years they had all developed their own ways of doing spreadsheets and budgets. This was often in response to the reporting needs of external research funders, but the result was that they developed confidence in their own figures.

What perhaps emerges is the lack of any generally available or recommended courses, and the seemingly haphazard way in which these Academic Managers, most of whom were accountable for fairly large budgets, actually acquired their skills in this area.

> *Finance is one area - that is a skill that in corporations people spend a lot of time getting training, but it does not happen with universities. Yet we are 'managerialist' and demand a whole host of things!* (Respondent No 1)

5.7.2.3 Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Respondents did not necessarily feel that they personally needed high level skills in this area, but its importance in changing the ways that teaching, learning and research will take place in the future was emphasised.

> *ICT? – I did not come with any level of (*qualifications*)..but it is important. Our curriculum and some of our admission tools they are moving into the Hi Tech level…the use of software for teaching is very critical and one needs to have an understanding. For instance teaching to students who are using new technologies like Skype.* (Respondent No 1)

This kind of future is definitely on the cards. Plans are at an advanced stage in one faculty which is looking at using technology in a very creative way to deliver lectures and course materials to students in electronic formats so that they can study at a time that is convenient to *them.*

> W*hy don't we tell our students 'Here are the expected outcomes, here are the guidelines, here are all the resources- go away and do it! When you are ready, show up at my door and we will do an assessment.' Maybe that is where we need to go. We are not there yet-but things will change….* (Respondent No 5)

In general the IT support available to respondents was perceived very favourably.

> *We have very good IT administrative support in this school, so if my computer flunks out, whatever happens, and I mean* ***whatever****.. it is one phone call 24/7 to the IT guys and they are here – they will even meet me at the airport and reboot my laptop!* (Respondent No 3)

> *ICT – a very big issue so, I know a bit about that, I have unbelievably good ICT staff.* (Respondent No 8)

5.7.2.4 Strategic Planning

All respondents acknowledged the need for strategic planning, and this seemed to be functioning fairly well at the school and faculty level.

> *I think we became, as a School, pretty smart! We had regular strategic planning sessions with external people, every year we have a different objective in mind, what is it that we want to achieve, and we put that into every document that we put out there e.g. we are committed to quality standards for staff, undergraduates and post graduates, we strive to offer equal opportunities for all learners, within a vibrant research culture, our school is the envy of other schools for its good spirit…. and we achieve that.*(Respondent No 8)

> *Strategic Planning? - I think I can do that well for my level.* (Respondent No 4)

There did, however, seem to be some mismatch between the planning at faculty and school level and the overall strategic planning for the University (Wits Vision 2022 alluded to earlier). Two respondents were quite scathing about this. The thrust of both arguments was that central planning was very much 'Top – Down' with insufficient consultation and attention to detail. The result was that plans ran into difficulties at the implementation stage. Sometimes schools and faculties felt alienated from this process and believed that the targets they were set were impossible to achieve.

> *OK, we have a really, really poor strategic planning division for the university as a whole, a much better devolved strategic planning at the faculty level. It often clashes with the implementation - you can do your strategic planning, but to actually get it implemented! You get caught in a Catch 22.*

> *I have a problem with the way Wits determines what is a strategic plan. You should first have many discussions and see where everything goes- benchmarking, all kinds of things, before you basically decide 'We want to do this' ….but, the university has already made a decision on this! We will not complain, accept what we have got, and carry on, because if you complain, what can you do? – nothing!*

5.7.2.5 Policy Formulation and Implementation

As has been described earlier, respondents are very aware of, and broadly supportive of university policies which are seen to be necessary, comprehensive and generally well thought through.

Respondents therefore did not really perceive a need for them to have any particular skills in this area. This was perhaps best summed up by respondent No 1

> *By and large policy is designed at the University level, and so one constantly reviews the policies to see what they provide, and different units of the university are given the opportunity to make inputs.*

5.8 REFLECTIONS ON OVERALL MANAGEMENT STYLE AND LEADERSHIP ISSUES

The last section of the interview schedule 'exploring your perceptions of the wider institutional context' (Refer to Appendix A) asked some very open ended questions as to how participants perceived the overall management style of the institution and whether they thought this was an appropriate style in the circumstances.

Perhaps the strongest theme to emerge here is that the academic managers interviewed would prefer to be *inspired and led*, rather than *managed*.

Leadership in this context definitely requires consultation, listening to colleagues and taking their views seriously, but it does not mean 'democracy' nor does it mean unending debate. The biggest tension, it seems, will always be about achieving that balance between the need to consult and the need to make and implement decisions. This is extremely difficult, but on the whole the respondents to this study came across as pragmatists who ultimately recognized that the leadership role does require making decisions, not all of which are going to be popular.

> *We can discuss things but, when the time comes for us to implement what we agreed on, then we must get on with implementing* (Respondent No 1)

> *The best leadership is formed from people who are really strong and who really lead and who don't feel the need to justify…. If strong leadership says 'I am doing this, here is why I am doing this', people tend to say 'Oh, OK!' When people debate something for 9 months and then still make a bad judgement, then people say 'Goodness gracious me! Well, what the hell is all this about?'* (Respondent No 8)

> *Sometimes one also has to make a decision, and if that is now' managerialism' that people complain about, well then, it is how it is. Our decisions are usually not made willy- nilly – it comes from a specific history, but it is again about communication* (Respondent No 5)

5.9 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 has examined the key findings that emerged from the in depth interviews in relation to the overall research questions set out in Chapter 1. The presentation has attempted to faithfully record respondents' own perceptions of the world they inhabit, through their own eyes, whilst the

analysis has tried to make sense of this. Inevitably the structuring of this analysis has involved both generalisations, some of which undoubtedly would not hold true with a larger sample of respondents; and reductions, where much of what respondents said, has not been presented.

The aim was to paint an in depth, and nuanced, picture at a particular point in time of the world in which Academic Managers at Wits University operated in 2012, set against a background of significant change in Higher Education generally and South African Higher Education in particular. Chapter 6, which follows, sets out some overall conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study set out to be descriptive and exploratory in nature and it is hoped that, through the approach adopted of in depth interviews and thick descriptions, a clearer understanding has emerged of the world in which academic managers, at the University of the Witwatersrand, in South Africa in the year 2012, operate, the challenges they face and some of the ways they have devised to deal with these.

Academics and those involved in the administration and management of Wits itself, and possibly other universities in South Africa, may find food for thought here particularly when it comes to the recruitment, development, training and mentoring of both existing academic managers and those being groomed for the future.

Specific research questions were posed in Chapter One, conclusions and tentative recommendations are presented below in respect to each. This study, due to its limited scope, cannot make any recommendations that are of general applicability.

It appears that academic managers are indeed expected to play a wide variety of roles, and a number of these have been posited in Chapter Five in an 'idealised' form, based on the responses of participants. What emerges is just how demanding and complex are the demands being placed on academic managers, that 'change is the only constant', and that success, even survival, in such a role requires a somewhat unique combination of skills, experience and personal attributes. . This is not a role for everyone, and not every brilliant professor will find that he or she, adapts easily to this. Both individual academics, and those responsible for promotion and hiring of individuals in the academic space, need to give very careful thought to career trajectories.

Old conceptions of an 'ivory tower' academia, somehow divorced from the concerns of the real world, appear to have little place in the present day realities of being an academic manager at Wits University. A range of powerful stakeholders are demanding, and getting, not only greater accountability but real involvement in the way an institution like Wits is run. The increased influence of state and private institutions, both as funders and working partners in co-determining the trajectory of research and even the content of professional courses emerged particularly strongly in this study (refer to Section 5.3.1).

Respondents emphasized the primacy of formal decision making structures and the role of long established rules, regulations and procedures. In general they were very supportive of this. At the school and faculty level the general perception was that there is a considerable degree of autonomy

at Wits, possibly an unusually high degree, in terms of interviewees' experience of other South African institutions. When it came to describing how they personally made decisions, most respondents said that they went to considerable lengths to ensure they consulted widely before making any important decisions.

Respondents identified a number of potential and real sources of conflict in their working lives. These were enumerated and discussed in some depth together with various ways the respondents had found to adapt and cope with this.

There is a body of literature, particularly from the developed countries, and perhaps principally from the 1990s and early 2000s, which paints a very bleak picture of academics feeling very disillusioned and overwhelmed by their responsibilities and threatening to leave the profession in droves. Some of this was referred to in the literature section. This study however found little evidence of this. Although it is abundantly clear that those interviewed had many onerous responsibilities and several examples have been quoted of situations where they experienced conflict, angst and indeed even emotional trauma, the researcher's overwhelming impression is that of an adaptive and pragmatic approach. The very limited scope of the study makes it impossible to draw any general conclusions.

Besides the examples of specific responses presented in the preceding section, four overall and very generalised coping strategies, based on participants descriptions, were presented viz 'time management'; 'continuous learning'; 'working the system' and 'working collaboratively'.

In the specific context of Wits University, the general perception of respondents was that the institution prefers where possible to nurture, groom and promote from within its own ranks. In this context the acquisition and internalisation of specific institutional knowledge becomes significant, and can be a daunting challenge to those that do come from 'outside'.

Although most respondents did feel adequately prepared for promotion when it came their way, some specific skills gaps were identified. It is suggested that time spent in improving current training on offer, and implementing better support systems for academic managers, would be a sound investment. The study gives some insight into areas where this would be appropriate. This is both from the perspective of getting the best out of the people entrusted to this role, and to ensure, particularly in the early stages of the transition they need to make out of pure academia, that they do not feel completely overwhelmed and simply give up.

Much of the literature section was devoted to a discussion on the perceived influence of new forms of public administration, the 'managerialist' discourse and how this has changed, is changing, the way that higher education institutions are run in the 21st Century. At its most basic level this is portrayed as a war of competing ideologies in which one side, the 'managerialists', are gaining in power and influence, destroying the old ways of doing things, all at the expense of the 'academy', a brotherhood of academics who in the past ran things as a 'company of equals'.

The tentative indications of this study are that some aspects of managerialism seem to be background noise, part of the environment. The majority of respondents to this study have adapted, accepted, and internalised many of the outward trappings of the management role e.g. the need for quality control and performance review, strategic planning, organizing, motivating, corralling - they accept responsibility and accountability. They are comfortable working in a hierarchical structure and accept the need for division of responsibility and reporting lines.

There is contestation around some of these issues, particularly performance management at the individual level and how academic output, teaching and research, can be measured in a way that is fair…but if there ever was a battle between managerialism and colleagialism, it appears to have already been won.

Whilst the legacy of collegialism remains in the deeply ingrained belief that a co-operative, consultative style of management is the best, if not the only, way to run an academic institution such as Wits, it is exactly that - a style of management, not a completely different system. Managerialism, in the *non-prerogative* sense of the term, and bureaucratic administration are the pre-dominant forms in which the university that was the subject of this study, appears to be run in the eyes of those who were interviewed.

All of the participants in this study had very strong views on the bureaucratic machinery at Wits, at one level they strongly supported and upheld the 'fairness' of playing by the rules and at another level they were frequently frustrated by the apparent failures of the system to be flexible and the petty demands it sometimes placed on them. This apparent dichotomy has been discussed earlier. Perhaps at its heart, and indeed at the real heart of the contestations around how 'should' an academic institution be run, lie alternate views of legitimate authority.

Here one can refer again to the German philosopher Max Weber. Weber recognized three types of legitimate authority. Firstly authority could be derived on *rational* grounds (relying on a belief in the legality of a set of rules and the right of people elevated to positions of authority under such rules to

issue commands). Secondly authority could be derived from *traditional* grounds, derived from long established traditions in society (eg the 'rights' of royalty to rule through succession or the strong respect in many cultures for the views of elders) and finally Weber recognized authority derived on *charismatic* grounds, as exercised by popular leaders through the force of their personalities or the strength of their achievements. (Weber (1924) p.3)

Perhaps the reason for much of the apparently conflicting views that arose from participants in this study regarding 'bureaucracy'; or on how senior management at Wits could manage things 'better' lies here. The managerialist argument at its heart is a rational one 'let us run things, because this is the best way to run things', but in universities it inevitably comes up against the very powerful forces of charismatic authority (every academic is an expert) and indeed long established and dearly held traditions.

Contestation is inherent in this, and perhaps, rather than resisting it, it should be accepted and embraced as a very healthy thing for the future of intellectual debate and indeed the future of the academic enterprise, not only at Wits University, but in the wider world of higher education generally.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

BASIC DATA

Name:

Job Title:

Qualifications:

Length of time in current position:

Did you apply for the position from outside of the institution, or were you promoted from within?

Age last Birthday:

Sex:

Please Note: the purpose of gathering the information above is purely for subsequent data analysis and comparison. Responses from interviewees will be compared to establish if factors such as length of time in the position, age, sex, security of tenure have any discernible bearing on the answers given. Your personal information is completely confidential and WILL NOT be revealed under any circumstances without your prior knowledge and consent in writing.

QUESTIONS

1. **Exploring your perceptions of your role as an Academic Manager**

   - What are the main formal requirements of your role?

   - In a typical week what would you say (roughly) is the split of your time between the academic issues of teaching and research and administrative/management issues?

   - In your view, is this an appropriate allocation of your time? If not how would you change it and why?

   - What are the sorts of decisions you can make independently?

   - What decisions must be referred to a higher level of authority?

- What decisions are made in consultation with colleagues at the school/faculty level?

- In general terms which are the most difficult decisions to make and why?

2. Exploring your perceptions of the influence of stakeholders and their impact on your role as an Academic Manager

- who are the principal stakeholders you have to account to for your actions?

- Please discuss examples of your day to day interaction with the stakeholders you have identified, and how they influence the way in which you carry out your role

- Can you recall an incident in which the interests of one or more of these stakeholders was in conflict with one or more of the others, describe how this was resolved and in particular the expectations and demands this process placed on you?

3. Exploring perceptions of your preparedness and the support available for your role as an Academic Manager

- In retrospect do you think your background and experience prepared you adequately for this role? What were the things you found most difficult to deal with when you first took on the role? What are the most difficult things now?

- Do you think that people in positions such as yourself get sufficient support from your institution to effectively carry out their responsibilities and develop into the role expected of them?

- In what area(s) could the institution provide better support?

- To what extent would you say that your role requires specialist knowledge/experience in any of the following areas:

  - Managing, motivating and leading people
  - Financial Management
  - ITC
  - Quality control

- Strategic Planning
- Policy formulation and implementation
- Any other significant area where specialist knowledge is required?

4. Exploring your perceptions of the wider Institutional context

- How would you categorise/describe the overall style of management at your institution ?

- what are the primary forces/drivers (in your view) that have shaped the adoption of this particular style?

- do you think this is an appropriate style in the context of your institution? If not, in what ways is the style inappropriate?

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(To be completed by all participants)

I,_____

(FULL NAME AND TITLE OF THE PARTICIPANT)

Hereby certify, with respect to the Masters research project "*Experiences of Academic Managers in Higher Education in 2012*" being conducted by Richard David Henson, that:

1. I have been adequately informed of the nature and purposes of the research
2. I have been given sufficient information regarding Mr Henson's identity, background and contact details, including contact information on his supervisor
3. My participation in this study is voluntary and I am satisfied that my responses will be treated in a confidential manner
4. I am satisfied that my anonymity will be protected through the use of coded/disguised names of participants
5. I understand I am free to withdraw from the research at any time
6. I may request a final draft of the research report from Mr Henson (before final publication) to review to satisfy myself that my confidentiality and anonymity have been protected as promised

Signed:_____

Date: