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THE MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC CULTURE REVISITED: INTEGRATING UNIVERSITIES IN AN ENTREPRENEURIAL AGE

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INTRODUCTION

Some thirty years ago I published a paper, 'The Management of Academic Culture: Notes on the Management of Meaning and Social Integration' (Dill, 1982a), which has been frequently cited in the subsequent higher education literature addressing the concept of 'organizational culture.' Like the other early contributions to the general literature on organizational culture, my paper was inspired in part by the growing knowledge at that time about management processes in Japanese industries, which placed an emphasis on increasing worker interdependence and on developing a special organizational identity or culture as a means of enhancing worker loyalty and productivity. My paper also reflected a distinctive line of research on 'academic culture' then emerging within the field of higher education through the contributions primarily of Burton Clark (1970, 1973, 1983) and Tony Becher (1981, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1994) as well as my personal experiences with the symbols and ceremonies of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the US's oldest public university. In this paper I would like to revisit the concept of academic culture as I defined it, further clarifying what I meant by this term as well as relating the concept to more recent theory, research, and the contemporary challenges of universities.

MODES OF CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the years since I wrote my paper research on organizational culture, as suggested by the two most recent comprehensive reviews of the topic (Ashkanasy, Wilderom, and Peterson, 2000; Cooper, Cartwright, and Earley, 2001), has become much more diverse, with significant differences among researchers as to the definition of the concept and appropriate levels of analysis as well as contentious

debates over the legitimacy of relevant research paradigms. The studies of organizational culture in higher education have experienced a similar evolution (Välimaa, 1998). To provide an interpretive context for discussing my earlier contribution to the topic, I briefly review the related literature in higher education employing Clark's much cited categorization of the role of 'belief' in academic life (Clark, 1983). After first suggesting the importance of the symbolic side of higher education and arguing for greater emphasis on the normative dimension and its impacts on academic behaviour in future research, Clark outlined three levels of culture in higher education: the culture of the discipline, the culture of the enterprise (i.e., organizational culture), and the culture of the academic profession and/or national system.

Of these three the concept of a shared culture of beliefs among the members of the academic profession in a particular national system has received less attention in subsequent research. Clark (1983) himself provided an important example of this concept with his description of the national influence of the shared belief in academic freedom as articulated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) when it was founded after the First World War.[1] Over many decades, through the public identification and celebration of professorial 'martyrs' to academic freedom (i.e., dismissed faculty members), through rigorous, objective evaluations of the circumstances surrounding each supposed transgression of academic freedom (i.e., a 'ceremony' or 'ritual'), and through the 'black listing' of universities that violated its beliefs (i.e., sanctioning non-believers), the AAUP significantly reshaped the framework conditions of universities in the US. Eventually the boards of control of all major public and private universities formally adopted the AAUP's beliefs as a basis for institutional policy. More recently the important role played historically by academic beliefs in other national systems in shaping 'academic identity' has been exposed by the implementation of major policy reforms in a number of countries (Henkel, 2000). For example, in the UK and other 'Westminster' systems of higher education, the extent to which academic identity was shaped by collective academic beliefs in the required autonomy of publicly financed universities and in a necessary 'gold standard' of university performance has been dramatically revealed by national reforms influenced by a different set of beliefs derived from the new institutional economics (Dill and van Vught, 2010).

One very valuable contribution to the limited research on the culture of the academic profession is the national survey of college and university faculty members in the US regarding ethical beliefs about teaching by Braxton and Bayer (1999).[2] Their study discovered that the strength of professional norms with regard to responsibilities for teaching, advising and grading, obligations for the planning and design of courses, and commitments for the governance of the department and university are weakest among faculty members in US research universities. They also studied differences in disciplinary cultures and noted that there was greater agreement on ethical standards for teaching and their enforcement in more paradigmatic fields such as the sciences than in the social sciences and humanities. These observed differences in professional norms across disciplines have not received the scholarly attention they deserve. The intriguing approach to the study of academic culture by Braxton and Bayer (1999) is certainly worthy of replication in other countries.

The larger body of research on culture in higher education has been on the topics that Clark termed the culture of the enterprise (or organizational culture), and the culture of the disciplines. While there were progenitors, arguably Clark's (1970, 1972) own study of the organizational 'sagas' of distinctive American liberal arts colleges was the defining contribution to the concept of organizational

[1] See also Dill (1982b).
[2] See also my more recent analysis of academic ethics (Dill, 2005).

culture in the social sciences.[3] In this study Clark examined the evolution of several well regarded liberal arts colleges in the United States. He discovered that their reputation was achieved in part because each developed over time a unique saga or story of triumph over challenging circumstances, an integrated self-belief in a history of hard work and struggle leading to uncommon achievement. Anticipating the focus of organizational culture research that followed, Clark's study examined the nature and impacts of the social context of organizational life: the role played by language, symbols, ceremonies and institutional legends as well as the influence a shared set of beliefs had on the loyalty, commitment, and effort of organizational members. Clark also identified some of the critical variables affecting the strength of organizational culture: institutional size, complexity, and control. For example, symbolic bonding may be more significant in small, liberal arts colleges than in large research universities, in private institutions that must compete for their own funds than in public institutions with more predictable sources of financial support, and so on. Finally, while Clark examined in his study the influence of founders and administrators on the development of a saga, his perception of the role of human agency in the development of an organizational culture was clearly more collective and collegial than managerial.

The research that followed Clark's contribution, both in the field of higher education and in the social sciences more generally, focused to a much greater extent on the role of administrators and managers in organizational culture. With regard colleges and universities these studies included analyses of how the specific behaviours of institutional leaders may help embed or transmit organizational culture (Tierney, 1988) and how strategies, practices, and processes characteristic of the general management literature may influence organizational culture and adaptation in higher education (Sporn, 1996; Kezar and Eckel, 2002; Bartell, 2003; de Zilwa, 2007). In a review of much of the recent research on organizational culture in higher education Silver (2003), echoing a number of the constraints Clark identified in his early research on organizational sagas (see above), concluded that '(u)niversities do not now have an organizational culture' (167). While Silver believed there was evidence to support the view that the academic disciplines were an influential source of belief, professional identity, and loyalty, he argued that attempting to amalgamate these sub-cultures into a common institutional identity was impossible and ignored the reality of the value conflicts and lack of coherence that characterized contemporary universities.

As Silver noted, the culture of the disciplines has been the most studied and affirmed component of Clark's cultural typology. The early research by Biglan (1973a,b) provided empirical support for the influence of disciplinary structures on many aspects of academic behaviour including: the amount of social connectedness within disciplines; the degree of commitment to teaching, research and public service; the quantity and type of publishing; and the number of dissertations sponsored. Biglan's disciplinary classification has been validated in numerous subsequent studies and is primarily responsible for the inclusion of academic discipline as an important control variable in studies of higher

[3] However, though Clark's (1972) study was based on systematic field research and appeared in the premier journal of organizational theory of the time (i.e., *The Administrative Science Quarterly*), outside of the field of higher education the significant contribution Clark made to the concept of organizational culture appears to have been lost. For example, none of the papers written by leading researchers in the field that appear in the two most recent collections on organizational culture (Ashkanasy, Wilderom, and Peterson, 2000; Cooper, Cartwright, and Earley, 2001) cite Clark's article. A number of years ago I once quipped, when given the privilege of introducing Bob Clark to a professional audience, that because of his rich vocabulary he may be passed over as the 'father' of the concept of organizational culture, because he chose to use the more evocative term 'saga' rather than the more pedestrian term 'culture' to describe his concept. Sadly, perhaps because of the current influence of digital search systems, this comment appears to have come true.

education.[4] In a related series of studies Becher (1981, 1984, 1987, and 1989) expanded the previous research on the academic disciplines to focus on the influence of the social and cultural aspects of subject fields. Becher's research helped to emphasize the normative aspects of academic behaviour, the means by which the values and beliefs guiding appropriate and inappropriate professional behaviour are communicated and enforced in subject fields (Braxton, 1986, 2010). Becher emphasized that the shared way of thinking and collective manner of behaving that makes it possible to integrate the teaching and research activities of largely autonomous academics is significantly shaped by social interactions within each discipline such as the recruitment and initiation of academic staff.

Given this brief review of the related literature as background, let me now revisit my original paper to clarify its contribution to the field.

MANAGING ACADEMIC CULTURE

In my original article, consistent with the research reviewed above, I focused on the normative aspects of academic institutions. I argued that since universities were value-based organizations (Long, 1992), they needed to actively manage their academic culture and that this involved two interrelated and significant mechanisms of coordination and control in professional organizations: the management of meaning and the management of social integration.

My emphasis on coordination and control through norms and values was informed by traditional sociological perspectives on professional organizations including universities. From this perspective the complexity of tasks in universities requires that the academic staff as in other professional organizations be granted a substantial amount of individual autonomy in teaching and research in order to function effectively. Traditional hierarchical methods of coordination and control are therefore ineffective in professional settings and the necessary integration of autonomous professionals must be achieved instead primarily through socialization to common norms and values. For example in applying his model of the 'professional bureaucracy' to universities Mintzberg (1979) similarly argued that long years of educational training supplied future faculty members with the standardized skills and knowledge characteristic of their particular subject. Their approach to teaching, to their subject content, and to their research was therefore influenced by these ingrained norms. As a consequence, faculty members could teach individually and independently because the professor lecturing on physics to engineering students could successfully predict what the professor lecturing on calculus to the same students was covering. The norms of professional socialization thereby permitted faculty members to effectively coordinate their teaching and research while working in a largely autonomous fashion. In a related study Hage (1974) provided important insights into the role ongoing communication with organizational peers plays in further socializing professionals to necessary values and norms. He argued that this communication is not vertical, as with administrators, not primarily written, as in reports and procedural documents, and not episodic. Rather, the communication is horizontal, with respected peers, largely verbal and face-to-face, continuous, and focuses on the exchange of information about means of improving core professional tasks.

[4] For a very thorough and informative review of the research on academic disciplines, including the studies verifying Biglan's (1973 a,b) classification, see Alise (2007). Lodahl and Gordon's (1972) related research suggesting the influence on academic behaviour of the level of consensus about theory, methodology, techniques, and problems within a scientific field was published before Biglan's work and offered a rival framework. But following Cole's (1983) systematic study questioning the validity of disciplinary consensus as a measure of significance, empirical research on disciplinary variation no longer includes consensus as an independent variable.

My concept of the management of academic culture therefore had similarities and dissimilarities with the literature that followed. It was similar in that I drew attention to the need for universities to attend to the language, symbols, and ceremonies that help clarify and give meaning to academic work. Obvious examples included the communal designation of outstanding teachers and researchers (i.e., what I termed 'the canonization of exemplars') as well as ceremonies that demonstrate and reinforce the values essential to the academic craft such as public PhD defences and Festschrift celebrations. My concept of academic culture was also similar to the studies of organizational culture and the culture of the disciplines in its analysis of the culture within universities. It was particularly similar to Becher's approach to the culture of the disciplines in that I emphasized as noted above the need to achieve social integration within universities by attending to mechanisms of collegial communication and control that help socialize faculty members to the values essential to academic work.

However, my concept of managing academic culture differed from the literature on the culture of the disciplines in that I addressed mechanisms of socialization that influenced the values of all or most members of the academic staff, not just socialization processes within a particular subject field. My concept also differed from most of the organizational culture research on higher education that followed in that I focused less on the actions of university administrators or the processes of academic management and more, as suggested by Hage (1974), on the language and symbols expressed by peers and on the collectively organized socialization mechanisms of the university that influence the core activities of teaching, scholarship and research.

There are a number of collective mechanisms in the disciplines by which the norms or values that guide appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in teaching, scholarship, and research are communicated and controlled. These include collegial processes for the selection of academic staff, peer observations of teaching, peer review of research proposals, peer review of scholarship and research submitted for publication, and ultimately peer decisions on promotion and tenure in subject fields. In line with Silver's (2003) challenge to the existence of a unifying university culture, it may be fairly asked whether it is meaningful in the modern university to assume that there are also broadly shared values on teaching and research that can be communicated and controlled through the collective actions of academics themselves. In my original paper I proposed a hypothetical response to this question by recommending the creation of 'guilds' of outstanding teachers to define and preserve the values essential to teaching. That is, while most universities attempt to manage the meaning of good teaching by identifying and celebrating outstanding individuals who embody the values necessary for good teaching ('the canonization of exemplars'), these universities had as of the time I wrote my original paper failed to manage the social integration of these values by developing appropriate means for communicating and embedding these norms among all members of the academic staff. Creating a guild-like mechanism composed of these 'sanctified' teachers and awarding to this group responsibility for socializing other members of the academic staff to the values essential to good teaching could, I suggested, be one means of achieving the necessary integration. Since I published my paper a number of US universities have in fact created such collegial bodies with institution-wide responsibilities for fostering good teaching. At the University of North Carolina, for example, following the recommendations of a faculty task force, a UNC Academy of Distinguished Teaching Scholars was created.[5] The Academy's mission is to 'promote excellence in teaching through short-term and long-term educational and scholarly initiatives, [provide] advocacy and support for teaching, [and develop] financial resources to encourage teaching excellence.'[6] The members of the Academy are drawn from

[5] The actions taken to form this Academy, and similar actions taken at other US universities, were motivated to the best of my knowledge by collegial concerns and values and were not inspired by anything I said or wrote!

[6] See: http://www.unc.edu/depts/adts/index.html

those individuals on the academic staffs who have won one of the university's distinguished teacher awards.

A more definitive example of the articulation and enforcement of shared academic values in modern universities, that illustrates my conception of the management of social integration, is the creation of collective processes for communicating and controlling the norms necessary to protect human subjects in academic research (King, Henderson, and Stein, 1999). In recognition of atrocities perpetrated by medical researchers under the Nazi and Imperial Japanese regimes during World War II, as well as inhumane research studies conducted by academic researchers in the US and other countries, many professional societies have developed norms and ethical guidelines for the protection of human subjects in academic research. Partially from the influence of members of the academic profession who share these values (cf. Clarks' conception of the culture of the academic profession), and partially from the influence of government agencies that fund research involving human subjects, contemporary universities in a number of countries have created collective mechanisms (e.g., in the US so-called Institutional Review Boards or IRBs) to communicate and embed ethical norms (i.e., values) guiding behaviour in research with human subjects. These processes often involve attempts to socialize all relevant academic staff to these guidelines through workshops and research manuals, as well as collegial mechanisms for enforcing these values through peer reviews of research protocols and proposals. The focus of these processes on the communication and control of broadly shared academic values is clearly indicated by the scope of the processes, involving not only researchers in the medical and biological sciences, but also some experimental studies involving human subjects in the social sciences as well as some interview-and observation-based studies on sensitive issues in the social sciences and humanities. The extent to which these collective processes actively manage and reshape existing norms of research and scholarship is evident in the sometimes sharp debates among university faculty members over perceived conflicts between the value of protecting human subjects and the core academic values of freedom of inquiry and the unfettered pursuit of the truth.

There is also contemporary evidence of attempts to manage the symbolic side of universities, what I termed the management of meaning. The emergence of a global rivalry among academic institutions and of a related market competition among universities for outstanding researchers, able students, and funds from all sources has created strong incentives for university administrators to try to sharpen or clarify an institution's identity, reputation, or 'brand' (Toma, Dubrow, and Hartley, 2005). This is obvious in institutional self-designations as 'world class,' 'entrepreneurial,' or 'international,' as well as in the ubiquitous emphasis on university logos or mottos. Much of this emphasis on language and symbols reflects efforts at external marketing rather than the nurturance of an organizational saga (cf., Clark, 1972) that develops loyalty and commitment among university members. Nor does the current emphasis on university 'branding' address my conception of an academic culture that defines, communicates, and helps embed the values essential to effective teaching, scholarship, and research within universities.

In contrast changes in the framework conditions of universities suggest that the management of social integration may be of greater importance now than when I first wrote. The rapid expansion and fragmentation of academic knowledge has lessened prior agreement on academic norms, standards, and content at the subject level.[7] Disciplinary cultures now appear to play a lesser role in the coordination

[7] Commenting on the contribution that increased specialization makes to disciplinary fragmentation Clark (1996) observed:

> In mathematics, 200,00 new theorems are published each year, periodicals exceed 1,000, and review journals have developed classification scheme that includes over 4,500 subtopics arranged under 62 major topic areas. In history, the output of literature in the two decades of 1960-1980 was apparently equal in magnitude to all

and control of academic behaviour (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Achieving integration at the subject level is made even more challenging by the development of new multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary subjects. Designing and teaching academic programs that provide effective student learning in these fields necessarily requires even greater coordination than in traditional disciplines, but ironically existing disciplinary norms frequently act as a brake on cooperation in multi-disciplinary subjects. At the same time university reforms in many countries are creating a more 'corporate' university, in which the individual institution will have greater control over the development and approval of its academic programs, the appointment and promotion of academic staff, and the management of research (Dill and van Vught, 2010). Therefore the need to develop collective processes for managing academic culture in the contemporary university -- understood as the communication and control of the values and norms affecting teaching and research -- has likely become even more significant.

MANAGING SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY: THE CASE OF ACADEMIC QUALITY

One clear contemporary instance of the management of social integration in the terms I have described it is the development within many universities of new collective mechanisms for assuring quality in academic programs (Dill, 2007; Dill and Beerkens, 2010). Attempting to develop a stronger culture in support of effective teaching, student learning, and the assurance of academic standards provides a good example of the problems associated with communicating and controlling the essential values to guide academic behaviour. With the declining influence of disciplinary cultures universities themselves must find more effective means of promoting integration within academic programs. It is after all at the subject level that academic quality is demonstrably assured and improved. Along these lines a series of studies on successful self-governing organizations by the Nobel Prize winning political economist Eleanor Ostrom (Ostrom, 1990, 1998, 2000; Ostrom and Walker, 1997) provides additional support for the ideas already outlined regarding the design of mechanisms for promoting social integration within universities.

An example of a collective mechanism for transmitting and embedding essential values is the process developed in a number of universities for addressing marking standards. Grade inflation, or more accurately grade compression in which few low marks are awarded to students in a subject, is receiving increasing attention in many universities (Yorke, 2008). With the adoption of modular instruction and continuous assessment the traditional discipline-based process of external examining employed in a number of countries has become less reliable as a means of assuring equity of marking standards within as well as across subject fields (Lewis, 2010). In addition, the wide spread implementation of student surveys and of department funding based upon student enrolment and/or graduation rates increases the incentives for academic staff to be more generous in their marking standards.

A number of universities have therefore taken collective action to address the grade inflation issue. At one university I have visited the Faculty Senate created a standing committee to develop and

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> that was published from the time of the Greek historian Thucydides in the fourth century B.C. to the year 1960. In psychology, 45 major specialties appear in the structure of the American Psychological Association, and one of these specialties, social psychology, reports that it is now comprised of 17 subfields....In the mid-1990s, those who track the field of chemistry were reporting that "more articles on chemistry have been published in the past 2 years than throughout history before 1900." *Chemical Abstracts* took 31 years to publish its first million abstracts, 18 years for its second million, and less than 2 years for its most recent million. An exponential growth of about 4 to 8 per cent annually, with a doubling period of 10 to 15 years, is now seen as characteristic of most branches of science (pp. 421-422).

implement university-wide marking standards. The committee defined and published general grade distribution guidelines for the university as whole and monitored departmental grade distributions for each term. Members of the committee met with departments, which varied significantly from the grading guidelines, and asked them to provide supporting arguments and evidence for the observed exceptions. While the committee actively pursued fairness in grading across units, it was equally concerned with promoting the value of educationally defensible grading policies within each academic program.

A second example of an effective collective mechanism for assuring academic quality was implemented ironically in one of the most research-intensive institutions I have ever visited. Within this university the academic quality assurance process was not in the hands of administrators, but the responsibility of a committee of faculty members elected from across the university, who were respected researchers and scholars committed to assuring academic standards. It was this committee, not an administrative office, which was actively pressing each department to demonstrate the effectiveness of its processes for improving teaching and student learning. The committee required initial reports from each department on its quality assurance processes, but followed up these reports with meetings with the members of each department to provide criticism and suggest needed improvements. This committee was a formal standing committee of the university, an integral part of the university governance process, with close linkages to the academic deans.

The design and conduct of these collective processes of quality assurance illustrate a number of the points I have suggested about the management of social integration in universities. First and obviously these processes were designed and carried out by academics themselves (Ostrom, 2000). They are core processes of each university's academic governance system, not temporary task forces, or procedures delegated to administrative offices or staff members. Second, monitoring is applied to all academic units and addresses factors known to affect student learning -- grading standards and collective processes for assuring academic quality. Research suggests that a social norm of cooperation is most likely to evolve in an organization when its members believe that rules will produce collective benefits and when monitoring is fairly and systematically applied to all, that is 'free riders' will not be rewarded (Ostrom, 1998). Third, the processes included written reports, but the committees avoided the danger of empty 'proceduralism' by emphasizing collective discussions. Thus the committees met face to face with the members of each academic unit as a means of reinforcing collective norms, changing expectations, and fostering group identity. Through this direct communication there is also the greater possibility of disseminating information on means for improving core academic processes including the transfer of best practices developed in other academic units of the university.[8] Both laboratory and field research suggests that face to face communication in social dilemmas is the most effective means of producing substantial increases in cooperation over time (Ostrom and Walker, 1997).[9]

At the same time, as noted in the earlier discussion about the norms governing research on human subjects, collective debates about core academic values are unlikely to proceed smoothly or without rancour. Discussions about the definition of academic quality, about the specification of student outcomes, and about essential academic responsibilities in teaching will necessarily engage legitimate

[8] Research on 'learning organizations' -- i.e., organizations skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, as well as adapting their behaviour to reflect new knowledge – has identified a number of activities that are necessary conditions (Dill, 1999). The identified activity *least* in evidence in a study of contemporary universities was a process or structure encouraging the transfer between programs of implemented innovations for improving teaching and student learning.

[9] In their study of academic ethics, Braxton and Bayer (1999) also argued that effective deterrence and detection of proscribed academic behaviour is more likely to occur in departments that have frequent social contact. Departmental meetings, face-to-face informal interactions, and performance reviews related to teaching and student learning provide the social ties necessary for the communication, observation, and enforcement of ethical standards.

professorial concerns regarding academic freedom, intellectual autonomy, and managerial control. The degree to which these types of issues are under discussion and vitally debated within universities may be the best measure of the extent to which necessary social integration is being effectively engaged within modern universities.

CONCLUSION

As Burton Clark (1983) made clear universities are 'culturally loaded' organizations, in which values such as objectivity, academic freedom, and respect for students and human subjects guide academic behaviour and are therefore reflected in the language, symbols, and ceremonies of academic life. In recent decades the emergence of a more competitive international market among universities has been interpreted as threatening core academic values (Teixeira et al, 2004) and the symbolic life of universities now appears to be more focused externally on marketing the institution than internally on clarifying and embedding the values necessary to sustain the integrity of academic work. In the new world of the corporate university, where many institutions are being accorded greater autonomy over their internal affairs, the successful management of academic culture may well determine whether the university fully meets its responsibilities to society. As I have tried to suggest this will involve strengthening the collective processes by which the academic members of the university communicate and enforce the norms and values essential to teaching and research.

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