Collaborative Decision Making in an Australian University: The Impossible Dream?

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ABSTRACT

Managerialism is the dominant management practice in higher education decision-making. Collaboration is only allowed, or even actively encouraged, in teaching and research. In all other organisational matters there is a prevailing top-down approach to decision-making. The result is managers who believe that they always know better than those they manage. This paper challenges that dominant philosophy. It utilises a qualitative study of the latest strategic planning process at Murdoch University where there was an attempt to use a more collaborative and participatory approach. It concludes that there will need to be significant changes in organisational culture; communication processes; leadership ethos; and, management mindsets before effective collaboration, in the form of employee participation and involvement in decision-making, can develop and flourish.

INTRODUCTION

Managerialism is the dominant management philosophy and practice in Australian universities. But is it here to stay? And should it stay? The result of existing managerialism practice is a top-down approach to organisational decision-making with managers often believing that they know better than those they manage (Tourish, 2006) and where workforce collaboration is seen in disparaging terms—as an outmoded, 'collegiality' notion which is seen as incompatible in the 'modern' corporatised university (Holloway, 2004). Even Oxford University, after nine hundred years of collaborative, self-government by the respective colleges is at risk of losing its long-established (and successful) tradition of collegiality. The new Vice-Chancellor Professor John Hood has argued that centralisation is "…necessary to modernise decision-making and maintain Oxford's world-class status" (Halpin, 2005: 29). This can be seen as a classical attempt—through the artificial creation of uncertainty and some notion of external 'threats' to the future of the institution—to implement an agenda of corporatisation and managerialism where devolution and delegation of decision-making was previously the norm.

This paper challenges that dominant philosophy. It utilises a qualitative approach to the study of the latest strategic planning process at Murdoch University where there was an attempt to use a more collaborative and participatory approach. This was part of a larger case study into the decision-making processes within the institution and the tension between the collegial and emerging corporate

cultures[1]. The study used an action research approach to analyzing the contested domain of managerial decision-making in the modern university. It concludes that there will need to be significant changes in organisational culture; communication processes; leadership ethos; and, management mindsets before effective collaboration, in the form of employee participation and involvement in decision-making, can develop and flourish.

INFORMING APPROACH AND CASE STUDY SITE

The research method utilised within this paper is the action learning, action research (ALAR) method (Sankaran et al, 2001). This component would be classified as emancipatory action research, where the researcher is an integral part of the process and the end aim is change in the system itself. Action learning and action research of this type focuses on the notion that social science research has some identifiable form of usefulness to society. It is a research approach whereby a group of individuals collaborate with the intent of improving their work processes.

As a result it certainly suits the application of this approach to studying and resolving organisational issues and problems. Carson et al (2001: 158) define action research in simple terms as "…*essentially about a group of people who work together to improve their work processes*" (emphasis in original). However, one of the oldest and most sustaining and widely accepted definitions is by Rappoport:

> Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by a joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework (1970: 449).

Action research therefore has a critical inquiry edge (Crotty, 1998). The researcher(s) effectively become co-researchers with other people from within the organisation with responsibility for the project shared by everyone (Carson et al, 2001: 167-168)[2]. In a business or university domain, this tends to encourage new ways of thinking that leads to restructuring processes and attempts to deliver systemic improvements, in this case with respect to the organisational decision-making process.

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[1] This is the subject of another paper that assesses both the positive and negative aspects of the Australian university version of managerialism – the importation of private sector practices and mindsets into the public sector.

[2] In this study the first author has been an academic staff member of the Murdoch Business School for more than fifteen years which brings a depth of ethnographic richness to the analysis of the events within the institution. In addition he was a major player in the construction of the methodology that MU decided to deploy as part of a more participative strategic planning process.

Case Study Site and Organisational Background

Murdoch University Tertiary Institution (MU) is a research intensive medium-sized university in Australia first established in 1972. Murdoch University (MU) is one of four public universities and one private university located in Perth, Western Australia.[3] The University is the smallest in size of the public universities with three campuses: the main campus at South Street and satellites at Rockingham and Peel. The University has a high, national reputation for its teaching quality and research quantum. The institution like many others is strategically positioning itself within the series of reforms to higher education that the current federal government has brought in during the last decade.

The University consists of nineteen schools within which there are usually several discipline groupings. There is a Head of School in charge of the administrative and academic responsibilities within each of these designated academic organisational units (AOUs). The schools are then aggregated into three Divisions under an Executive Dean—each of these Executive Deans has been appointed from within the academic ranks. The university has been growing steadily in student numbers and equivalent full time students over the past two decades. There were 13,217 undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled as at the 31 March 2006 census date (Murdoch University, 2006). The majority of students are non-school leavers forming nearly sixty percent of the student population. There are also 462 fulltime equivalent (FTE) academic staff and 742 general and professional staff employed by the institution (Murdoch University, 2006).

In addition there are a number of administrative divisions each currently managed by a Deputy Vice Chancellor[4]. The university has a Vice Chancellor as the top bureaucratic officer of the institution. S/he is effectively the organisational chief executive officer (CEO). S/he reports to the university governing body headed by the Chancellor who is usually an eminent member of the public. The University is not unusual or unique in having this type of organisational structure.

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[3] The other universities are the University of Western Australia (the oldest); Curtin University (with a technology focus); Edith Cowan University (the newest with a teaching and applied research focus) and the University of Notre Dame (a private Catholic university).
[4] This is a recent organisational move implemented earlier this year. During the period primarily analysed in this paper the title was Pro Vice Chancellor.

Participant Data Collection

The sample for the qualitative case study component of this paper was a group of fifteen interview participants selected from across the different community groups within Murdoch University. They included a mix of students, academic staff, administrative staff and members of senior management—two of the interviewees were members of the senior executive group and two others were senior administrative staff members. The actual interviews were conducted between October 2004 and February 2005.

The sample group was a non-probabilistic purposive or judgemental sampling whereby the participants involved in this study were chosen from the existing organisational networks of the first author (Neuman, 2000: 198). This sampling method used those existing social networks and was built upon these relationships. It also allowed *opportunistic observations* of happenings that occurred before, during and after interviews. The participants were known to the first author who was often present and interacted with them—in different organisational and social contexts—for extended periods of time which went well beyond the interview times. As a result the participants were observed in different organisational scenarios over lengthy periods of time.

Respondent data was collected through the use of an in-depth semi structured interview. Each interview was planned to last approximately one hour and each was tape recorded with the written consent of the participant. After each interview was completed the data was transcribed from the tape onto separate word processed documents. Secondary archival data was also collected from diverse sources such as annual reports; electronic sources; official university minutes; official and publicly available university documents; and, email communications.

Interviews

All participants interviewed were volunteers and the prime research method was open-ended semi-structured, conversational interviews.[5] This approach can be classified as a variation of conventional

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[5] This style of interviewing is a compromise between unstructured and highly structured interview techniques. While unstructured interviews (those without particular questions) tend to reveal a broad range of information which can be difficult to analyse, highly structured interviews (such as those in a face to face survey) may not

anthropological ethnography, which has been adapted to this case study of strategic planning and organisational culture at Murdoch University.

An interview or conversation with a purpose is an art rather than a skill (Berg, 1995: 29). Berg refers to three distinct types of interviews: standardized interviews in which the questions scheduled are formally structured; a non-standardized interview which does not have a schedule of formal questions and does not know what primary questions to ask and tends to be highly exploratory in nature; and, a semi-standardized—or semi-structured—interview which allows the researcher to use broadly predetermined questions and topics (1995: 33). This study used the last type. The semi-structured interview was used to keep the conversation within the framework of the subject of study. The same planned questions were utilised as much as possible to assist the respondent to concentrate on the central issues but additional questions and variations were used depending on the flow of the conversation during the interview. In addition, a semi-structured interview gave an opportunity for the respondents to raise additional relevant themes.

The following two sections examine the strategic planning process and the responses and reflections of academics, general staff and students to this 'process', that produced the current 2003-2007 plan for Murdoch University (MU). This is followed by a critique of the prevailing model of managerialism arguing for an effective collaborative and participative approach to enhance the decision-making process within Australian universities.

MU STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The present state of affairs commenced with concerns raised at a Senate meeting on 2 April 2001 in which questions were raised about ensuring greater involvement and interaction by larger parts of the university community in the strategic planning process (Senate, 2001). This resulted in Senior Manager A (President – Academic Council) then being tasked with ensuring that the current planning process had much wider input and to also engender greater commitment and participation throughout

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elicit any insightful information because the right questions may not have been asked. Thus, the semi structured interview gives the researcher and interviewee some degree of direction while, at the same time, empowering the interviewee to pursue their own agendas—other topics of special interest and/or concern that are related to decision-making at Murdoch University.

the institution. A Steering Committee was set up which met formally a total of seven times during the entire process but there had also been a large number of informal and smaller sub-group discussions.[6] The initial discussion focussed on the procedures to be employed resulting in the acceptance of the recommendation to use a variant on the 'emergent' planning approach with an accompanying participative methodology (First author, 2002; 2001).

The next phase of the project was determined to be an all day session of what was designated as the Community Representative Group. It was decided to hold this off campus on October 12, 2001. The specific objective of the day was: "Brainstorm ideas that are important for the Strategic Plan and allow the senior executives to understand the 'baggage' that comes with those ideas" (Murdoch University, 2002). The tasks of this large group were to identify a series of broad strategic directions/themes and to identify the informing organisational values to which Murdoch should aspire. The purpose of this day was not to construct the actual strategic plan but to open debate and to also expose the senior executive group, who were all present, to the prevailing thinking on campus.

There were over sixty people present; representing students (members of the student guild); representing academics (Heads of Schools); and, representing administrative staff (Heads of Offices). They were briefed in the week prior to October 12 at a number of separate meetings to enable all to attend. The idea was to ensure that they were fully aware of the methodology and the tasks to be achieved on the day. The overriding concern was to avoid elements of deep cynicism emerging and to clarify the organisation's commitment to this revised planning process. It was made clear that the Habermasian concept of the 'force of better argument' would prevail throughout this process (First author, 2001). These people were also tasked with discussing the plans for the day itself with their colleagues and to act as their representatives.

The first part of the day was a vital session in which Senior Manager B (the Deputy Vice Chancellor) provided a lively and spirited introduction on the notion of sustainability as well as a briefing on MU

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[6] The members of the Steering Committee were the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Professor Senior Manager B; President of Academic Council (Senior Manager A); the University Secretary; the Director - Policy and Planning; the Chief Financial Officer; John De Reuck (Murdoch Business School); and myself, first author (Murdoch Business School).

and its position in the Australian higher education sector. It was clear from his presentation that he was fully committed to this wider and more inclusive deliberative planning process. His presentation went a long way to dispelling the levels of cynicism that were still present amongst many participants at the beginning of the day. He certainly inspired them to become fully engaged with the process on the day itself. This was followed by further briefings which helped to provide the participants with several different overviews and perspectives on the situation and scenarios facing the institution (First author, 2001).

A strong and lively debate ensued which helped to identify a number of broad strategic themes, which were subsequently discussed in greater depth in breakout sessions. The breakout groups were composed of a maximum of nine people with an even representation from the three main constituent groups. This was done to minimise social loafing and, more readily, capture alternative arguments[7] and debate (Baker et al, 2002: 328-329). The briefing material; the records of the outcomes from the day; the deliberations of the breakout groups; and, background papers were compiled and placed on a World Wide Web web site located on the campus wide information system (Murdoch University, 2002). A number of mailbomb e-mails were subsequently sent out to the university community asking for their interaction and response to what had resulted from these deliberations. This site was left open for community and staff feedback.

The next stage was a two-day planning retreat (25 and 26 November, 2001) for the senior executive group (SEG - 12 people in total) comprising the Chancellor; Acting Vice Chancellor (Senior Manager C; Deputy Vice Chancellor (Senior Manager B); two Pro Vice Chancellors; four Executive Deans; President of Academic Council (Senior Manager A); Director – Policy and Planning; and, the Director of Finance. Three people, including John de Reuck (from the Murdoch Business School) facilitated this retreat. The time was spent evaluating what had emerged from the larger group on October 12 and was synthesised into a draft and 'broad' strategic direction. Even the resulting draft strategic vision was compiled as three separate possible statements based on the 'broad' direction identified but awaiting further selection and refinement following extensive community feedback. None of the

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[7] This part played an important role because it helped to establish the 'legitimacy' of arguments and thus undermine the authority of 'position power' in a top-down system of decision-making.

deliberations were discarded and alternative strategic options have been recorded to form part of the *reserve coverage* (i.e. decision alternatives). The results of the retreat were subsequently presented to the university community in an open briefing for all interested staff on December 6, 2001.

The outcome was a major rewrite of the draft plan to construct a set of words that would keep true to the earlier deliberations throughout the University community but would be less likely to encounter external resistance. A series of iterative steps was then carried out simultaneously on the various campuses. Executive Deans, Heads of Schools and Heads of Offices provided additional briefings and further opportunities for staff members to provide additional informal or formal input into the planning process. Students through the Student Guild also had a similar degree of additional opportunities to participate. No one could then claim that they were neither aware of nor had the opportunity to participate if they so wished.

Once this final feedback had occurred the strategic plan was then revised and formally presented to both Academic Council and Senate for their approval and ratification. The final step was to accept and then promulgate publicly the finalised plan. It was a short document with a higher, slimmer set of performance indicators that was intended to provide the strategic framework within which the Divisions and Schools then developed their lower-level strategic and detailed operational action plans utilising a similar more participative planning approach.

Up until this stage the collaborative process (where collective input was incorporated into the university decision-making process) and resulting plan had proved to be both a reasonably successful process which had delivered a 'broadly' agreed set of outcomes. Unfortunately the plan was not completely finalised until 2003. The main reason for the protracted final delay was the appointment of the new Vice Chancellor Professor Senior Manager D who took up his appointment in September 2002 (Senate minutes, May 2002).

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS ON COLLABORATION AT MURDOCH UNIVERSITY

Murdoch University's strategic planning process for the 2003-2007 period was a serious attempt to use a more collaborative approach combining both a bottom-up and top-down planning decision-making

methodology. The initial reactions of the fifteen respondents to the MU planning process were positive.

In response to the first question about the process there was generally a sense that they had been (allowed to be) 'involved' in the process and felt positive about the experience(s). The response by Eric captures this positive feeling:

> …it was an interesting exercise and what came out of it was a blue[print]...the re-emergence of what had been called the MU ethos but the idea that we could be something different, that we really had the wherewithal to trade on the idea that you could teach with a strong emphasis on building [a] sustainable world…And then we went through a process of seeing how we could make that all work together and into a strategic plan that could be operationalised and we also did some reflection on whether this was a sensible move for the university, how it would fly in the local community, how it would fly nationally…(personal communication, 2004).

As another respondent put it: "I thought the involvement was critical and I think the engagement with huge numbers of faculty was also very important…" (Elizabeth, personal communication, 2004). This was also reflected in a similar judgement by Dominic: "I thought the process was quite good…as I say I've never been involved with that sort of thing before. The very fact that we did it to me was fantastic" (personal communication, 2004) and by Nellie who said she was: "Delighted to be invited…yes, I had input into that. I thought the exercise to be quite useful, people were engaged" (personal communication, 2004). However, not all respondents were as positive in their initial assessment. Kenneth argued:

> I have to say that I think many staff are probably rather more like myself and have had limited involvement in the strategic planning and that's not simply to do with push factors and [inaudible] being pushed out…but people are very busy and they've got many things on their mind and there're always serious nagging doubts about how seriously strategic plans [are] taken when many of the features in the university environment relate to exogenous forces about which...the strategic plan may or may not be an effective way of dealing with it (personal communication, 2004).

In summary, the participants did agree that they had either been directly involved or provided with the opportunity to do so if they so wished. The process had not been the usual top-down planning approach dominated by senior management and the university planning staff.

Those staff members who did get involved in the planning process generally were satisfied with the depth and extent of their involvement. Some like Martin had additional input at the governing body level—at MU Senate meetings—such that:

> I was a senator through that period so I had quite a lot to do with it from [the] Senate point of view…so I did have an ongoing involvement at that level and quite a lot of involvement too [in] trying to shift

some of the language which I succeeded in doing in a few cases even after...when it was coming up from the community it still was losing some of its language by the time it got into Senate… (personal communication, 2004).

However, the enthusiasm was a little muted and is best captured by Elizabeth's assessment taking into account the usual 'office politics' so prevalent in the university organisational environment:

When you start to get involved in some of the politics of what was happening at the institution at the time and I've got to be very careful of not putting over a very jaundiced view but on the whole the answer would simply be yes (personal communication, 2004).

This degree of muted interest and some uncertainty is not unexpected in that for most of these participants this was the first time that they had been involved in just such a major organisational exercise.

It is apparent that the degree of involvement was more extensive than in past strategic planning exercises but the respondents had identified that there was still need to allow for more time in the earlier phases of developing the plan and to enable deeper input and engagement across the university community. In our judgement, there was more opportunity allowed for involvement by the academic stakeholders and far fewer opportunities for the general staff and student stakeholders during the different planning phases. We do not claim that this was a deliberate oversight but it was a methodological failure in the collaborative process that was used on this occasion. It needs to be acknowledged that all stakeholders should have had equal opportunity to participate in such decision-making scenarios.

When asked for a summation of their experiences with the MU final deliberation process—this provoked a series of what we would classify as 'negative' answers. The participants responded by venting their concerns with what they perceived as the process being 'derailed' or 'captured' by the incoming new management hierarchy under the newly appointed Vice Chancellor Professor Senior Manager D who took up his appointment in July 2002[8] (Senate Minutes, May 2002).

The following responses best encapsulate these concerns that surfaced so strongly amongst the respondents. Eric cogently argues that the strategic plan was ready for implementation by July 2002 but:

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[8] Professor Senior Manager D was an Executive Dean at Murdoch University under the previous Vice Chancellor Professor Senior Manager E and took over from the Acting Vice Chancellor Senior Manager C who had helped to initiate the current strategic planning process.

It was ready for sign-off...and then we had a change of Vice Chancellor...Well the strategic plan in its current form is...oh well I'd say unrecognisable. The word sustainable doesn't appear...oh it might appear somewhere but even funnier still is [that] the notion of targets evaporated...and unfortunately the current document is not a strategic plan (personal communication, 2004).

Elaine's judgement was that at this time the planning process had effectively been politically derailed:

It was so political it was a joke. And this is to do with the change of the guard at the top you know because the previous one [the draft strategic plan] had been the responsibility of the DVC [Deputy Vice Chancellor – Senior Manager B] and the DVC's contract was not going to be renewed and so was the case of I was [being] tarred with a brush. The fact, you know, is that I still had to help them get out of it. I was the only one with the experience and the expertise (personal communication, 2004).

These assertions were backed up Elizabeth who was quite adamant when she argued that the 'draft' plan: "Well, it's died in the water from my perspective" because as she claimed "…sustainability *was* [emphasis added] the number one objective" and now the organisational focus was merely "…simply the need for survival" (personal communication, 2004).

This sense of disappointment was reflected across nearly all the respondents but at the same time they clearly identified why this had occurred. The retirement of the Acting Vice Chancellor Senior Manager C on 30 June 2002 (Senate Minutes, May 2002) meant that one of the early key champions of the process that had ensured the collaborative delivery of the 'draft' planning outcomes had now departed creating a change of management hierarchy and leadership culture within MU. It was clear that the incoming Vice Chancellor (Senior Manager D)—who had had close involvement with the collaborative construction of the 'draft' plan—was no longer willing to immediately commit his new administration to the agreed 'draft' strategic decision outcomes. This became clear when it took a further eighteen months to finalise and publicise the strategic plan which was officially launched in November 2003 after being approved by MU Senate on 18 August 2003—more than *twelve* months after the 'draft' plan had been prepared (Senate Minutes, August 2003: Item 4).

Effectively, the final outcomes had been kept 'secret' until they had been ratified and modified by the new senior management team as evidenced in Elaine's and Eric's earlier comments and judgements about what had happened. In so doing the new Vice Chancellor was effectively exercising his authority and setting his/her future direction for the organisation. The reins of centralised managerial power were once again clearly being reasserted. This is not unexpected because in many organisations—private or public—an incoming CEO often wants to distance himself/herself from

what had previously been put in place by preceding senior management teams. S/he then effectively proceeds to 'construct' the current and future strategic direction for the organisation.

This was, we would argue, a 'snap back' to the centralised and authoritarian power and control so redolent in the managerialism dogma. Moreover it suggests that without sweeping changes to organisational culture, communication processes and leadership ethos attempts at collaborative decision making can be readily undermined by authoritarian managerial mindsets.

DISCUSSION: MANAGEMENT WORST PRACTICE

The prevalent senior executive mindset favours a market forces, economic rationalist, top-down decision making approach to university management in Australia and overseas (Tourish, 2006; Holloway & Holloway, 2005; Yielder & Codling, 2004; Thornton, 2004; Holloway, 2004; Eveline, 2004; Bessant, 2002). This is not unique to the higher education sector. Pusey in his treatise (1991) clearly elucidated the dominance of this mindset in Canberra. He claimed that more than ninety percent of the executive mandarins in the federal public service believe strongly in an economic rationalist approach to managing public sector organisations.

The evidence in the literature is quite clear that managerialism has led to the corporatisation of universities in Australia and overseas. This corporatisation trend has been blamed for diverse and negative outcomes including creating an overall 'climate of fear' (Bessant, 2002) and even 'corrosive leadership' resulting in:

> …the perception by managers that they are a new êlite whose role is to increase productivity and maximise limited resources through constant surveillance and auditing has contributed to the normalisation of a corrosive form of leadership (Thornton, 2004: 23).

There have been case studies in tertiary sector change management decision-making which include major, or what Miller et al (1997) refer to as quantum, restructuring changes (Ritter, 1998; Glendon, 1992) to minor change management in MU (van Rhyn and Holloway, 2004). The common theme in these three studies is a top-down, authoritarian approach to decision-making. It is clearly evident that corporatisation and managerialism is pervasive in the higher education sector in Australia and overseas.

Handy (1986) asserts that organisations are over-managed and under-led. This is certainly the case with universities because many academic leaders have merely "…gravitated into managerial roles at the expense of any real leadership [experience]" (Yielder & Codling, 2004: 320). Given the claims of a 'climate of fear' amongst university staff (Bessant, 2002)—partially from an over-management syndrome—our assessment is that a significant, quantum level of organisational change is necessary to embed any form of collaborative decision-making approach.

There are, however, some examples—few and far between—in the higher education literature of calls for a more collaborative/collective approach to governance, change management and decision-making (Holloway and van Rhyn, 2005; Yielder & Codling, 2004; Holloway, 2004; Hellstrom, 2003; Stagich, 1999). These are embedded within a wider literature in which effective groups—instead of just individuals with a common interest—acting in a coordinated and organised manner in a collective action process increase the net organisational benefits (Ostrom, 1990; North, 1990; Olasen, 1967).

Is it possible to change this current top-down authoritarian decision-making phase within the university sector? Yes it is. Tourish questions whether "…demoralization and disempowerment [can] really produce a clever country?" (2006: 27). His argument is that the Howard government is to blame for the policies that have produced this particular version of managerialism in Australian universities and this approach "…embodies the folk wisdom of an untrained supervisor in a mid-19th-century textile factory" (2006: 27).

Tourish posits a threefold solution to enable universities to do what most *effective* organisations actually do. Firstly, improve employment security by increasing the percentage of staff with ongoing (tenured) employment relationships. Secondly, decentralise decision-making by providing the workforce with greater autonomy and discretion. Thirdly, improve pay and encourage trade union organisation because:

> Higher pay attracts the brightest and the best, and is a characteristic of businesses that manage to sustain top performance over an extended period. Individual contracts tend to reduce the median level of pay while undermining the team spirit central to organisational success (2006: 27).

This approach embodies the results of extensive research in the human resource management and organisational behaviour fields into entities that can be classified as high performing work

organisations (HPWOs). These have outperformed their rivals over long periods of time (Tourish and Hargie, 2004; Thompson, 2002; Collins, 2001; Reichfield, 2001; Collins and Porras, 2001; O'Reilly and Pfeffer, 2000; Pfeffer, 1998). These organisations are characterised by good communication processes; semi-autonomous work teams; effective employee participation; enhanced organisational commitment; high levels of training (for staff and managers); and, performance based rewards. High on this list is effective and open communication (Tourish, 2005) and the importance of commitment (Burton and O'Reilly, 2000; Hannan et al, 2000). This research also argues strongly that decision-making improves in a climate of debate, discussion and dissent (Tourish, 2005: 487).

Open information flows in organisations are vital. Wheatley puts this cogently:

> We have no desire to let information roam about promiscuously, procreating where it will, creating chaos. Management's task is to enforce control, to keep information contained, to pass it down is such a way that no newness occurs. *Information chastity belts are a central management function* (emphasis added). The last thing we need is information running loose in our organisation…
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> But if information is to function as a source of organisational vitality, we must abandon our dark clouds of control and trust in its need for free movement, even in our organizations. Information is necessary for new order, an order we do not impose, but order nonetheless. All of life uses information this way (1999: 97).

This needs to be combined with both two-way and critical upward communication flows. Organisational success and improved decision-making relies on this otherwise "…management teams become out of touch with their people and underestimate or miss emerging problems…" (Tourish, 2005: 485). The result is that more than half the decisions in organisations fail largely because of insufficient participation and ineffective communication (Nutt, 2002).

Finally, universities need to move away from the 'heroic leadership' template and embrace a true workforce empowerment approach (James, 2004; Bisoux, 2002; Ciulla, 1998). Eveline (2004) identified that university leadership was primarily hierarchical, top-down, detached and mostly male. However there was a strong layer of informal leadership which she described as 'invisible and ivory basement leadership' occurring at lower levels amongst general and academic staff. This type of 'post-heroic' leadership places greater value on personal relationships, teaching, loyalty and particularly collaborative innovation (Eveline, 2004: 1-5). There is hope for the future—even universities can aspire to become HPWOs.

CONCLUSION

The current version of managerialism in the Australian higher education sector as has been illustrated in this case study effectively acts as a constraint rather than as an enabling mechanism within individual universities. If significant changes to this managerial hegemony are, however, implemented with sufficient goodwill, resources and support from the key players and stakeholders then it will certainly be possible for an individual higher education institution to reap positive organisational benefits. These overall net benefits for senior managers, staff and the organization will, we would claim, be substantial.

The case study of MU shows that collaborative decision-making is possible at least in the short term. In the long term there does need to be a major change in the prevailing university management mindsets. We do not claim that this is possible across the entire sector. At the individual university level this supposedly impossible dream can be a reality. It requires a recognition by senior managers of what can be achieved as exemplified by the HPWO literature and organisational 'champions' willing to challenge the dominance of the managerialism dogma.

Ultimately there will need to be 'quantum level' changes in the organisational culture; communication processes; leadership ethos; and, management mindsets before effective collaboration in organisational decision-making can develop and flourish in an Australian university.

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