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## DEANS DO THOUGH DON'T THEY?

*Kit Field has been Dean of the School of Education at the University of Wolverhampton for three and half years. He has also fulfilled the role of Acting Dean for the University's Business School for a period of eight months. His presentation will look at the role of Dean, both as a leader and as a manager, taking into account:*

- *Leading a School of Education: mission, values and vision.*
- *The need to 'scan horizons' and make plans in preparation for change.*
- *The external facing role and responsibilities.*
- *Being part of a whole University management team.*
- *Macro and micro management.*

*The presentation will draw on real experiences, and will include personal as well as institutional challenges. The paper draws on some leadership and management theory, and relates these to practical and pragmatic decisions to be made during very difficult times.*

*Key words: School of Education, Dean, values and vision, mission, management.*

Values and Ethical Frameworks. What does a Dean do? A quick google search reveals the following:

“An academic dean is an educational administrator who serves as the head of a school within a college or university. Academic deans provide vision and direction to their school. They are responsible for guiding and directing the school's faculty, and they represent the school, its students, and its faculty to the campus as a whole”.

The next question must be: Why would anyone want to be a Dean? Such an aspiration can only be explained in terms of a personal biography. I am convinced that nobody begins their career with the ambition of becoming a Dean. One finds oneself in the position of being able to become a Dean, having taken opportunities over many years which lead towards that position. The keywords from the definition above are 'serves', 'vision', 'direction', 'responsible', 'represent'. Missing words might include 'leadership' and 'management'.

Three years ago, I was asked to deliver a paper on leadership. I entitled the paper “The burden of responsibility”. All of my life I have been drawn to leadership. As a young man I played sport, and was captain of every team I played for. As a teacher, I became a Head of Department in a secondary school. I have led units and centres in Higher Education, a Department and now a School. I have chaired cross-institutional committees. There is no doubt, in retrospect, that I must have always sought leadership roles, and I suppose others have recognised my capacity to lead. Linked to this desire to lead, are the reasons I chose to enter the education profession. In short I have wanted to make a difference. I have always wanted to make a contribution. My upbringing, as with anyone, instilled certain values -work hard and play hard, never let people down, be disciplined and honest.

Christopher Hodginson (1991) attempted to uncover the source of individual value sets. He begins by asserting the need to take individual personality into account, followed by 'kin and peer group'. Other factors which influence my perspective on life are the environment, culture and sub-cultures to which I belong. It is these unique combinations which lead me to hold values which overlap and chime with others' but which also make me unique. My professional, academic and personal values are what define me as a leader, and therefore as a Dean. I work in an academic environment, and therefore respect the quest for knowledge and truth. As Lawrence (1999) asserts, the profession would not be worthy if it did not do so. The School of Education prepares people for professional life, and I recognise the sense of professional codes of conduct, which include innovation, development, and also civic responsibility and accountability. At a personal level, I am gregarious, even a show off, but essentially I like working with people. I feel a sense of responsibility towards people, and I enjoy the social interactions that go with that.

I hold values dear. I insist that every unit I lead has explicit values, and that these are articulated in words, but are also evident through actions. I hold myself accountable to the values and I also expect the values to have been the outcome of consultation and discussion. I believe in consensus, rather than compromise, and aim to secure the commitment of all to the values. This relates back to one of the key words 'serve'. Thomas Sergiovanni's (1999) concept of servant leadership is one to which I relate.

I am also motivated and driven. I believe in the place of education to inform and to empower individuals, and also to transform and regenerate society. It is important that my actions and decisions are ethically informed.

My political stance (whether interpreted as liberal, social democrat or liberal democrat) determines, to a degree whether my approach is intended to benefit primarily the individual, the collective or an external authority such as the Government. At the most basic level, ethics are borne from customary practice, passed down by authorities, and, from a societal perspective, are crystallised in law. The legal requirements are mediated by professional bodies and organisations, yet the hierarchical hegemony of the law is beyond question. This apparent certitude is helpful to me as a Dean. First and foremost I must comply with legal and moral requirements.

Secondly, I am accountable to the profession. A feature of a profession is that it is self-regulating, and therefore to an extent appears to be above the law. However, no profession has inherent legitimacy. Respect has to be earned and the risk of a conflict between the legal and professional dimensions is high. Lawrence (1999) notes how professional power, derived from the view that professions are self-regulating, can lead to some professions exerting too great an influence over the human agenda. Education is, history tells us, an effective propaganda tool. Ethics based on legal foundations protect against corruption.

Another key feature of a profession is its unremitting focus on the client/service user. Koehn (1994) is very clear. Professional powers should not extend beyond serving the public good. Lawrence (1999) recognises a sense of de-professionalisation the moment the profession shifts its attention to emphasise its own success as opposed to meeting the needs and wants of the customer. In a more commercialised age, this can relate to the generation of externally sourced income. My role as the leader is to maintain the focus of all forms of provision on those we serve at all times. The risk associated with failing to do so extends beyond individuals to the institutions in which I work. Personal and organisational ethics and motives can conflict with the professional. Risk assessment guards against the adverse effects of breaches of ethical codes.

Lawrence (1999) feels that any ethical code must relate to institutional aims and objectives. Vision and mission, again must be explicit, and shared. By carefully articulating ethics and consequently governance, the institution is able to reinforce and enhance the profile of itself it wishes to project. As Dean, I should recall, I am responsible for representing the institution to others.

Self-examination, and the scrutiny of ethical codes emanating from social, legal, professional and institutional sources assists me as Dean to weave a path with which I am personally comfortable. This 'weaving' involves mediation, negotiation and sensitivity to others, best expressed through a public statement of

the values intended to underpin the School's role and intended purposes. (Lawrence 1999).

This need to self-protect and the obligation to declare my values are all the more necessary in a modern society which emphasises consumer rights in public services above traditional expert and professional judgment. Eraut (1994) claims that part of being a true professional is knowing when ethical questions should be asked.

#### Mission and Vision

My own values demand that a Dean's first priority is to agree and fix a mission, i.e. to set a purpose for a School of Education which is itself underpinned by values. This inevitably involves a process of negotiation with all stakeholders, and the development of a vision of what the work of the School will look and feel like. Neither the mission nor the vision can be developed in a vacuum. They must take account of the social, cultural, political, economic, professional and institutional landscapes. Unpacking this complexity is no mean feat, it involves an analysis of the current state of affairs and horizon scanning in order to future-proof provision to assure commitment and sustainability.

The first step involves identifying key principles which underpin the work of a University School of Education, which in commercial language is to identify and clarify the unique selling point (USP) of the School. What gives university-led work integrity can be reduced to two such principles: academic distinctiveness and quality. Both are valued, but both can lead to what appears a slow and cumbersome set of processes. These principles transcend the times, and are equally appropriate in a new world as they were in the old. A series of articles by American leaders of Higher Education Institutions (Breneman and Yakoboski (eds) 2011) has as an underpinning theme of moving from an 'old normal' to a 'new normal'. The 'new normal' includes a focus on academic enterprise, knowledge entrepreneurship, the cross disciplinary use and application of inspired research findings, being a force for societal transformation and a means of maximising the benefits of global engagement. All of these involve looking to, and planning for, a new future, and not dwelling on the past. In short, we may have been excellent at what we have done in the past, but what we are so good at may not be what is needed in the future. This challenge is intensified by the collective understanding that there is no single solution to the 'knotty' problems we face. For me, in the role of Dean, this suggests a piecemeal, 'just in time' approach, resembling trouble-shooting and offering no agreed and committed stance. In my view, schools of education are committed to shaping the future, not being victims of change. It is the mission and vision which serve as a form of glue, binding discrete ac-

tions into a strategic approach. The alternative is risking the loss of staff commitment.

Management and leadership texts are clear that systemic change takes up to three years or more. Existing leadership and management teams often consist of colleagues who have excelled in the 'old normal'. In a context where there is likely to be no return to the 'old normal' the challenge for a Dean is to avoid fighting a rearguard action. New ways of thinking and therefore possibly new staff are essential. At Wolverhampton, over the last three years the School has completely replaced its team of Associate Deans and Heads of Academic Departments, along with appointing a new team of partnership directors. It is this 'refreshment' that allows a different perspective on the future. New ways of thinking are also informed by evidence, rather than ideology. This provides the reasoning behind a focus on research. University-led provision must be informed and challenged by the outcomes of research. Universities are obliged to contribute to the development of new knowledge, and it is through rigorous research and dissemination that this is achieved. In addition research adds to our reputation and also provides income streams to the School. A Dean must promote and support research through a range of means, and for a variety of ends. Maintaining and increasing capacity must be a high priority.

The new normal, makes partnership and collaboration even more essential. Direct funding is being reduced – both from public and private sources. The force of globalisation demands engagement in a broader geographical field. Without a positive response, the profession risks irrelevance. The character of the student body is changing. They may take advantage of credit accumulation systems and flit from one provider to another, and/or dip in and out of accredited programmes in order to accommodate high fee rates and part time work. The sense of belonging to a single institution may be lost. Distinctiveness will be concerned with fitness for purpose, flexibility and a duty of care. On the other hand, Universities like Wolverhampton also have to accommodate local students, who do not arrive at the University with the cultural and social capital associated traditionally with higher education students.

Access to the internet increases the need to develop a competitive edge, which creates a further tension between different 'types' of student. The core value associated with inclusiveness means that Universities like that of Wolverhampton must cater for all. In addition, the market place is becoming more crowded. The examples from USA of 'for-profit' organisations competing with publicly funded institutions inject an even greater commercial dimension. It is through partnership that organisations can achieve greater reach, and also assure

an inclusive approach to education. The alternative response to marketisation is to create a competitive system which is riddled with duplication of effort. A partnership approach must not lead to a tiered system of research intensive institutions, teaching only-institutions and commercially viable consultancy units. It is the combination of all three that gives the sector authority and gravitas. Partnership is a key element of the mission and vision.

It is foolish to ignore the shift towards marketisation and indeed privatisation. However, it is interesting to note that despite the reduction in state support, enrolment levels have never been higher. University-led provision is popular, in the forms of research informed accredited courses, knowledge transfer, consultancy and CPD. One distinguishing feature is the concept of criticality, which should not be confused with criticism. Criticality must be positive and productive, or it becomes seen by others as a barrier to change. Criticality acts as a check against value-free innovation, but if not kept in check itself, can lead to ossification. Part of the 'new normal' is to promote creativity, innovation and enterprise.

In a world where the student is becoming a more and more powerful consumer, there is a need to, at least in part, match the offer/provision to the customer demands. A positive response to the student voice requires a constantly evolving pedagogy and infra-structure to allow for personal and professional growth. New forms of interaction and exchanges of ideas must enable innovation and development without compromising the high standards and quality of provision of which we are so proud. A student-demand system requires the publication of metrics relating to recruitment, retention, progression, student satisfaction, levels of care, contact time, facilities resources and employability. The Dean must lead the development of accountability systems. This apparent set of 'objective measures' reveals a commitment to the new normal, when much currently in place reflects an old normal. For example how many existing staff profiles mirror the demographics of the student body? Existing staff must change ways of working to accommodate new demands. More than ever students of different ethnic, cultural, class and age backgrounds are attending education related courses. Their demands include a requirement that education courses service career aspirations, and when organisations such as schools and colleges are our customers due account must also be given to organisational development.

The mission and vision are therefore built upon esoteric principles and values, yet are imbued with a sense of realism. The Dean's challenge in articulating an agreed message about his/her school/faculty contains a unique mix of:

- Fitness for purpose.
- Future proofing.
- Accountability.
- Concern for customer needs and demands.
- Marketability.
- Scalability.
- An emphasis on partnership and collaboration.
- Perpetual innovation.

In the current climate the combination of the above requires the Dean to consider re-focusing the offer/provision to include, in the case of Wolverhampton, the offer of products, services, consultancy and CPD in addition to retaining its contribution to education and training related courses, and without abandoning the distinctiveness of research, accreditation, criticality and quality. New interpretations relating to social justice and civic leadership must be clearly articulated and consequently staff roles and responsibilities must be continuously reviewed. No Dean can achieve this alone. Part of the leadership role is to draw on the perspectives and insights of others. We all have blind spots, and cannot be experts in all aspects. As Heifetz (1994) suggests, these new demands call for collaboration and a flatter management structure.

There are of course problems associated with the empowerment of others during times of change. The response to change by established units, designed to service 'the old normal' is often one of protectionism. The negative connotations of centralisation in order to address financial constraints are well known. The Dean and team have to accentuate the positives -scalability, replicability and efficiency. This demands an emotional intelligence, such as sense of empathy. The complexity and demands extend beyond this. Holub (2011) lists the accusations made against Deans at times of change and reorganisation. He points out that Deans run the risk of being accused of being a simple voice-piece for Vice Chancellors are too focused on his/her own career opportunities, being unconcerned about the School's established and successful identity and integrity and detaching academic staff from decisionmaking processes. A clear attribute of a Dean is a thick skin! To face up to such accusations is indeed in stark contrast to many Deans' intentions of:

- Serving the students.
- Engaging staff in the mission.
- Adjusting budgets and resources, (including human).
- Creating a sense of urgency without inducing panic.
- Developing a sense of inclusive leadership.
- Nurturing powerful relationships.
- Creating a climate which welcomes change, and.
- Reminding all of the crucial features of effective practice in face of an uncertain future.

So, what are the outcomes of this? One hopes an agreed mission and vision, achieved through consultation, but one which is in harmony with the Dean's own personal, professional and institutional values. In the case of the University of Wolverhampton's School of Education, a summary of the mission and vision is:

**Mission:**

- social inclusion and social change;
- critical thinking;
- to promote independence in learners;
- responsive to local circumstance and nationally and internationally driven educational agendas;
- to lead the transformation of learning in our region;
- to raise attainment and aspirations;
- to add value to existing resources and build capacity across the partnership;
- to foster innovation and promote best practice;
- to promote personalised learning and strategies.

**Vision:**

- a spirit of collaboration and sharing within and across organisation(s);
- a thriving and aspirational sub-region, driven by educational achievement;
- a locum for innovation, experimentation and best practice;
- a research informed education provision across all sectors;
- informed, open and transparent leadership;
- high quality provision across all activity.

Both of the above are founded upon agreed values. It is the values that provide a degree of consistency and coherence:

**Values:**

- respect for people, respect for professional judgement;
- sustained relationships with partners and clients;
- evidence based decision making and practice;
- embracing difference and diversity in terms of backgrounds and forms of provision across the world;
- intellectual freedom, creativity and innovation as a means of supporting improvement through change;
- transparent and clear approach to leadership and management;
- to contribute to economic, social and educational regeneration.

These have been achieved through a series of strategies, which have been intended to mirror the very values espoused. Questionnaires were sent to external stakeholders, asking for views on how we should work together and for what purpose. Internally a debate is stimulated through a Dean's Address which takes place at least annually. This is followed up in School Executive meetings, the School Management Team meetings and departmental meetings.

Cross-School committees address relevant issues (Quality, Learning and Teaching, Partnership and Collaboration, Research and Knowledge Transfer, International) and plans are formally approved at the School Board. In addition a School BLOG is maintained on the virtual learning environment to provide informal evaluations and comments.

#### Conclusion

Deans are human. They have a job to do, a job which is complex and multi-levelled. An analysis of the role identifies strategic and operational responsibilities, a need to promote the profile of the School, University, a focus on people and on tasks and an appreciation of the 'big picture' as well as the detail. In practice these are not separated into differentiated tasks, but are integrated and fully dependent upon each other. Success depends upon particular attributes, experience and a willingness to inform decisions and actions with the specialist expertise of others. Actions and decisions affect the organisational culture and climate, which in turn impact upon performance. The role is therefore demanding yet enormously fulfilling. During a period of change it is exciting, but also challenging. Being a Dean means enjoying the successes and feeling the failures.

#### КИТ ФІЛД

##### РОЛЬ ДЕКАНА: ЦЕННОСТИ И ЭТИЧЕСКИЕ НОРМЫ

*Кит Филд – декан факультета образования в университете Вулверхэмптон на протяжении последних трёх лет. Он также выполняет роль исполняющего обязанности декана бизнес-школы университета в течение восьми месяцев. Его презентация рассматривает роль декана, как лидера и как менеджера, принимая во внимание:*

- возглавлять школу образование: миссия, ценности и видение;
- необходимость “сканировать горизонты” и планировать подготовку к переменам;
- роль и обязанности декана как “внешнего лица”;
- быть частью всей команды управления университетом;
- макро и микро управление.

*Презентация опирается на опыт, и включает в себя как личные, а также институциональные проблемы. Статья основана на некоторых руководствах и теории управления, которые соотносятся с практическими и прагматическими решениями, принятыми в очень трудные времена.*

*Ключевые слова: факультет образования, декан, ценности и видение, миссия, менеджмент.*

#### КІТ ФІЛД

##### РОЛЬ ДЕКАНА: ЦІННОСТІ ТА ЕТИЧНІ НОРМИ

*Кіт Філд – декан факультету освіти в університеті Вулверхемптон протягом останніх трьох років. Він також виконує обов'язки декана бізнес-школи університету протягом восьми місяців. Його презентація розглядає роль декана, як лідера і як менеджера, приймаючи до уваги:*

- очолити школу освіти: місія, цінність та бачення;
- необхідність “сканування горизонтів” і планування підготовки до змін;
- роль та обов'язки декана як “зовнішнього обличчя”;
- бути частиною усієї команди управління університетом;
- макро та мікро керування.

*Презентація спирається на досвід та включає у себе як особистісні, та й інституціональні проблеми. Стаття основана на деяких керівництвах та теорії управління, котрі співвідносяться з практичними і прагматичними рішеннями, прийнятими у складних умовах.*

*Ключові слова: факультет освіти, декан, цінності та бачення, місія, менеджмент.*

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