

Reconstructing Relationships in Higher Education

Challenging Agendas

**Celia Whitchurch and
George Gordon**



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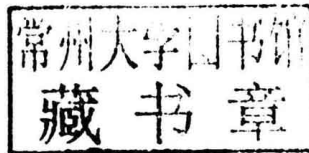


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Reconstructing Relationships in Higher Education

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Drawing on two international research projects, *Reconstructing Relationships in Higher Education: Challenging Agendas* looks behind formal organisational structures and workforce patterns to consider the significance of relationships, particularly at local and informal levels, for the aspirations and motivations of academic faculty. In practice, and day-to-day, such relationships can overlay formal reporting lines and therefore inform, to a greater or lesser extent, the overall relationship between individuals and institutions.

As a result, from an institutional point of view, relationships may be a critical factor in the realisation of strategy, and can in practice have a disproportionate effect, both positively and negatively. However, little attention has been paid to the role that they play in understanding the interface between individuals and institutions at a time of ongoing diversification of the workforce. For instance, they may provide space, which in turn may be implicit and discretionary, in which negotiation and influence can occur. In this context, *Reconstructing Relationships in Higher Education* also reviews ways in which institutions are responding to more agentic approaches by academic faculty, particularly younger cohorts, and the significance of local managers, mentors and academic networks in supporting individuals and promoting career development.

The text, which examines the dynamics of working relationships at local and institutional level, will be of interest to senior management teams, practising managers at all levels, academic faculty, and researchers in the field of higher education.

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In loving memory of Jane Gordon

If you get the relationships right, everything else falls into place
(learning technologist).

(Whitchurch 2013: 63)

Preface

This monograph builds on and updates material in *Academic and Professional Staff in Higher Education: The Challenges of a Diversifying Workforce* (Gordon and Whitchurch 2010), to consider developments that have occurred since then, both in the UK and worldwide. It also draws on the empirical studies associated with a report for the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), *Staffing Models and Institutional Flexibility* (Whitchurch and Gordon 2013), and a report for the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA), *Shifting Landscapes: Meeting the Staff Development Needs of the Changing Academic Workforce* (Locke, Whitchurch, Smith and Mazenod 2016). Although both projects were primarily UK based, both sought the views of international expert witnesses and commentators. These accounts, together with a reading of the international literature, have allowed an overview to be taken which is likely to have resonance in other countries, in particular the US, Australasia and South Africa.

Both studies looked at organisational structures, models and strategies, but also included qualitative narratives that give an insight into the hidden worlds of an increasingly diversified workforce, including those working on short-term and part-time contracts, those formally or informally restricted to teaching and/or research, and those undertaking roles with academic components but not necessarily having academic contracts. At the heart of this monograph are the dynamics of working relationships between senior management teams (or in US terms, senior administrators), local managers, rank-and-file faculty and their peer networks. Such relationships appear to be increasingly significant in ensuring that all these groups are committed to institutional missions at the same time as fulfilling their own personal and career aspirations.

It is intended that the text will be of interest to both academic researchers and practising managers interested in higher education roles and identities, careers and working patterns, as well as in institutional organisation and management. To address an international readership, the term ‘academic faculty’ has been used throughout to refer to what in the UK would be termed ‘academic staff’. Where there is reference to ‘managers’, these may be senior academic managers (such as vice-chancellors and pro-vice-chancellors in UK or Australian terminology),

presidents and vice-presidents (who would be termed ‘administrators’ in US terminology). ‘Local’ managers refers to those in line management positions, which can include academic faculty such as deans, heads of school or department. Within schools and departments it can also include those with, for instance, responsibilities for teaching and learning, educational technology and knowledge exchange. It has also been seen as important to include individuals working in so-called academic ‘support’ roles, in areas such as student welfare, widening participation, outreach and community partnership, employability, programme design and academic literacy. Although such individuals may or may not have academic contracts, their interface with those who do is increasingly critical for managing teaching and research. People not having academic contracts are sometimes referred to generically as ‘professional’ staff. However this is not intended to imply that academic faculty are not also professionals. On occasion the generic term ‘staff’ is also used to refer collectively to all these groupings. In the UK this does not have the restricted connotations that it has, for instance, in the United States, where it tends to imply individuals having neither academic nor professional contracts ie those in technical or clerical roles. Thus although this monograph is principally about academic faculty, there are occasions when reference will be made to the implications of institutional policy for relationships with professional and other staff. Similarly, the terms ‘school’ and ‘department’ are used to denote sub-units in the academic organisation of an institution. The term ‘faculty’, as used in the UK to mean a disciplinary grouping in the organisational sense has not been used, so as to avoid confusion with its use in relation to academic faculty.

Grateful acknowledgements are due to the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for funding the projects on which this monograph draws; to participants on the University College London Institute of Education MBA in Higher Education Management for stimulating discussions about the realities of day-to-day working relationships; and to the project team for the HEA project, William Locke, Dr Holly Smith and Dr Anna Mazenod. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Professors Rob Cuthbert, Jeroen Huisman and Jenni Case who kindly read and commented on an advanced draft of the text.

Contents

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
 PART I	
Structures	1
1 Introduction	3
2 Organisational frameworks	20
 PART II	
Relationships	43
3 Working relationships	45
4 Individual responses	62
5 The role of middle managers	84
 PART III	
Towards a constructive alignment	103
6 Emergent practices – bottom up	105
7 Emergent practices – top down	122
8 Reconstructing relationships	135
9 Conclusions	146
 <i>References</i>	 163
<i>Appendix: Details of the two studies</i>	175
<i>Index</i>	181

Figures and tables

Figures

3.1	Formal organisational relationships in higher education institutions	50
6.1	Engeström's 'third generation' activity system	118

Tables

1.1	The UK higher education workforce	10
1.2	The UK academic workforce	11
1.3	Respondents in the two studies	16
1.4	Institutional case studies	17
2.1	'Hard' and 'soft' aspects of human resource management	37
3.1	Seven UK institutions in relation to the types of approach they adopted to employment practices	58
3.2	Perceived advantages and challenges of <i>integrated</i> , <i>partnership</i> and <i>private</i> sector approaches	59
4.1	Typology of approaches to work/career, motivations and relationships	69
6.1	Components of the university and industry partner activity systems	119
7.1	Components of activity system relating to partnership and outsourcing arrangements	130
8.1	Faculty working relationships	141
8.2	Instrumental and investing relationships	143

