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# **Reconceptualising Management in Australian Universities: Contemporary Leadership, Active Followership and Effective Management**

Dr. David A. Holloway\*

*Murdoch Business School, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia*

Email: [D.Holloway@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:D.Holloway@murdoch.edu.au)

## **Reconceptualising Management in Australian Universities: Contemporary Leadership, Active Followership and Effective Management**

### **ABSTRACT**

*This is an analytical paper that argues for a more enlightened approach to management and leadership practices in Australian universities. The central tenet is that the classical ‘command and control’ mindset—so prevalent in Australian institutions—is no longer relevant in the turbulent and dynamic organizational environment confronting universities. I argue that a more inclusive and collaborative decision-making process that reconceptualises and reframes the more ‘traditional’ management and leadership mindset would better serve a contemporary university. I contend that if organizations such as universities are to reap effective organizational benefits from the existing high levels of knowledge/intellectual human resources capital—via the ability to ‘tap into’ the large staff pool of ‘creativity and intelligence’ that still marks a university as special in this cognitive regard—then strategic and operational decision-making should not remain the exclusive domain of specific individuals or very small elite groups at the senior management level.*

**Keywords:** Universities; Leadership; Followership; Managerialism; Effective Management

This paper is an analytical paper which posits that current management and leadership practices within Australian Universities are creating an organizational crisis situation. The embrace of managerialism; the ongoing reduction of federal public funding; and, the development of the ‘acadepreneurial institution’ have all helped to exacerbate the problem (Michael 2005: 22).

The paper is constructed as follows: firstly, a brief background to the problem is provided; followed by an overview and analysis of the concept of ‘managerialism’; and, its impact on the management approach adopted within universities over the past two decades. I then proceed to analyse the ‘state of play’ in the areas of leadership, followership and effective management. Finally, the current situation facing universities is assessed and the potential for positive management trends in the future is identified.

## BACKGROUND

Tourish and Hargie (2004a) take the position that there is a 'crisis' in relation to modern management and leadership. They argue specifically that: 'The agenda faced by managers is crowded to breaking point. These pressures sometimes see organizations fragment rather than cohere. A primary focus on the bottom line has often elbowed other considerations, including communication, to the sidelines. In the process, the theory and practice of management has entered into crisis' (2004a: 1).

In their analysis they identify a number of failings most of which they state are ignored by current management theorists.<sup>1</sup> These include the most typical management response to perceived difficulties which is '...most business leaders still instinctively respond to problems with a strong need to command and control' (2004a: 5). They go on to argue that management gurus, consultants and many management initiatives are implemented more in some sort of vain hope that solutions will eventually emerge. The following statement best encapsulates this almost cult-like approach to organizational problems and the decision outcomes that eventuate:

*Many management interventions can be likened to the North American rain dance, and indeed are often inspired by a similar desperation for results. Fantastic interventions are enacted and often enjoyed by central characters. The spectacle can also be fascinating for the uninvolved observer. But for all the drama and passion expended in their performance, they exert no appreciable impact on actual outcomes (Tourish & Hargie 2004a: 15)*

Their analysis is contained within an edited book titled "Key Issues in Organizational Communication". Their stated intention is to critically examine the full impact of key current themes in organizational communication for management practice. With such a title it is not surprising that in it they advocate that it is '...effective management of [the] communication process that brings large-scale organizational benefits' (2004a: 7). Tourish and Hargie (2004b) argue for a need for critical upward communication with the encouragement of open and honest feedback from staff at all levels throughout the organization.

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<sup>1</sup> They identify the following: imbalances in the power relationships of managers with the workforce; lack of empowerment; top down or laissez faire management styles; management misbehaviours and even claims of unbridled greed; too close a relationship between business and government; an over-reliance on a unitary top-down focus to problem solving; and, the use of a continuing series of management initiatives '...devoid of any real sense' (Tourish & Hargie 2004a: 2-6).

These developments are aligned closely with the central tenet in this paper that a more collaborative approach to decision-making results in more effective and robust decision outcomes as well as enhanced corporate functioning.

## **MANAGERIAL DECISION-MAKING PREROGATIVE: PUBLIC SECTOR**

Managerialism, the early umbrella term for the reforms that have occurred in the past three decades in New Zealand, Australia and internationally involves the introduction into the public sector of private sector concepts and approaches. The result is a shift away from concentrating primarily on accountability to a minister of the crown to a greater emphasis on ‘...what governments do and how well they do it’ (Weller & Lewis 1989: 1). The intention of this management reform is to have outcome and achievement oriented public sector organizations maximising value for money in a world of scarce resources.

The resulting prevalent senior executive mindset favours a market forces, economic rationalist, top-down decision making approach to university management in Australia and overseas (Bessant 2002; Codling 2004; Eveline 2004; Holloway 2004a, 2004b; Holloway & Holloway 2005; Tourish 2006; Yelder & Thornton 2004). The evidence in the literature shows 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 elite 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).

Despite a large number of critics over the years Hughes (2003) clearly argues that the public sector reforms are not a passing management fad and are here to stay. The current term used is New Public Management (NPM) although it should no longer be called ‘new’ given that it has now been in place for some considerable time. The essence of this viewpoint is that public institutions have to be more accountable for public resources and show that their organizational outcomes are worth the investment of funds by the taxpayer and society. These are positive and necessary changes given that the public

funding process is not bottomless. On the negative side, however, is the importation of the corporate notion of a dominant managerial hegemony in which management decides all things organizational. These reforms have extended to the university sector (Boden 2001; Christensen 2004; de Boer & Goedegebuure 1995; Holloway 2004a; Stewart 1997).

In many cases, I would argue, university Vice Chancellors and their senior executive have willingly embraced the NPM approach. As a result collegiality in decision-making has become a pejorative term. The focus instead was, and is, on ‘managers managing’ the institution with the appropriate level of accountability and responsibility for outcomes embedded only within senior managerial echelons. This managerial focus is usually reflected in respective delegations and University regulations, although not often reflected in the original university enabling Acts.

It is clear that a managerial hegemony in relation to organizational decision-making exists in the tertiary sector in Australia and overseas. However, I contend that if organizations such as universities are to reap the benefit from the existing high levels of knowledge/intellectual human resources capital—via the ability to ‘tap into’ the large staff pool of ‘creativity and intelligence’ that still marks a university as special in this cognitive regard—then strategic and operational decision-making should not remain the exclusive domain of specific individuals or very small elite groups. Effectiveness and not efficiency (falsely perceived as timely) should be the aim of well-constructed decision outcomes. The adaptability and self-organising capability of the workforce requires an inclusive, not exclusive, decision-making methodology to unlock and realise the full future potential of a contemporary university.

The following section examines the notion that the leadership role needs to be reformed and reconceptualised to enable modern ‘leaders’ to play a more effective part in the running of a corporatised university organization.

## **CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP**

The role of leaders in modern organizations continues to change significantly. The hero-style chief executive who makes all the big/key decisions that defines an organization and sets the future path(s)

is no longer relevant. The academic, practitioner and business education literatures are converging in that the notion of complex decision scenarios and environmental complexity and uncertainty necessitate team approaches and a redefinition of the role of leaders. The new role is one of coaching, support, facilitation and counselling which allows for the facilitation of a more participatory form of decision management (Bisoux 2002; Bolman & Deal 2001; Ciulla 1998; James 2004; Laszlo & Nash 2003; Parry 2002; Raelin 2003; Switzer 2003; Thomas & Willcoxson 1998; Tourish 2006; Wheatley 1999).

These notions are being extended into the area of leadership despite a prevailing belief that a leader's sole responsibility is to find effective, pragmatic solutions to organizational problems in which ethics plays no part (Ciulla 1998). Not only is the role of leadership being reassessed in light of ethical and moral insights but so also is the vital role of followers. This 'turn' is reflected in (some) Australian organizations as well as overseas. A collaborative approach to leadership is an organizational shift in the right direction (Avery 1999).

More important, I argue, is the need to ensure that key negative elements are countered effectively. These are the current imbalance in organizational power relations; executive self-interest often embedded in executive compensation and performance bonus schemes; and, (large) managerial egos. It is critical, therefore, that there are internal 'champions' for just such a change throughout an organization from the top to the bottom (Dean 2004; Knight 1987; Nah, Lau & Kuang 2001). What will be critical to this move is the development of the right level of motivation and the effective alignment of both management self-interest and organizational interests. Then such a deep move becomes more feasible.

Leadership in this scenario will need to be exercised at all organizational levels to ensure a successful transition to what Ciulla (1998) argues is 'true' empowerment in a process of real commitment to sincerity and authenticity. Wheatley views this as a natural move to autonomy and self-determination but uses a scientific underpinning of chaos theory and quantum mechanics to explain the need to do so

(1999). I would argue in favour of this move more from a pragmatic as well as an intellectual base. Organizations that have taken this path (in varying degrees) have out-performed their competitors.<sup>2</sup>

Strategically agile and the newly successful organizations will be essentially self-organizing systems that progress and succeed through initiative and self-control with little or no need for intervention from senior management. The role of the leader(s) becomes reconceptualized as one of facilitation and championing the new decision-making paradigm (Garratt 2000; Hope & Fraser 2003; Pasternack & Viscio 1998; Purser & Cabana 1998).

The following section examines the notion that the practice of followership also needs to be reconstituted and reframed to enable ‘followers’ to play a more engaged and active part in the modern university organization.

### **ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE FOLLOWERSHIP<sup>3</sup>**

The current ‘reading’ and construction of the notion of followership needs to be significantly reframed within a revised organizational context and framework. Followers cannot remain passive and powerless receptors of leadership inspired wisdom. The role of followers is no longer to be negatively cast as ‘passive sheep’ following unquestioningly a strong leader who makes all the key decisions. I would advocate that their role changes to one that is an ‘active’ followership at times interchanging the leadership–followership role and mantle of responsibility and interactivity.

In organizations even leaders have followership roles depending on their position within the organizational hierarchy. Organizations need—at whatever level organizational ‘actors’ can be construed to be followers—those who can be labelled as either dynamic, courageous or my preferred term ‘active’ followers. The idea is to avoid an organizational outcome aptly described in the de Jouvenal quote ‘...a nation of sheep begets a government of wolves’ (Kelly 1992: 34).

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of successes include: AT&T Credit Corporation; Federal Express; Weyerhauser; Motorola; Kodak; Hewlett-Packard; GE Appliances; Eli Lilly and Knight-Ridder (Boyett & Boyett 1998: 138-139). Similar experiences exist in other parts of the world particularly in Europe and would include Svenska Handelsbanken, Borealis, Asea Brown Boveri, Syncrude Chemicals and Sequoia Oil (Garratt 2000; Hope and Fraser 2003; Pasternack and Viscio 1998; Purser and Cabana 1998).

<sup>3</sup> This section is taken primarily from a paper I presented as a conference publication at ANZAM2006 on followership (Holloway 2006: 8-9).

There is a small but growing body of literature that advocates a recasting of the traditional role of followers (Chaleff 2003; Dixon & Westbrook 2003; Hollander 1992; Kelley 1992; Litzinger & Schaefer 1982; Raelin 2003; Vanderslice 1988). The call is to reconstruct the 'traditional' notion of 'follower' which tends to be a negative stereotype: typical followers supposedly display a passive and uncritical approach to work as well as lacking initiative and a sense of responsibility for outcomes. Such followers merely perform assigned tasks given them and then stop awaiting the next task. Active followers on the other hand are able to think for themselves, either individually or collectively as required; they exhibit characteristics more often associated with risk takers (and leaders); they are usually self-starters and problem solvers; they are rated highly by their peers and their nominal organizational superiors. I argue that these types of organizational 'actors' have discarded the pejorative 'follower' label: instead they are, or attempt to be, equal and active participants in the decision-making process(es).

There is a need for a radical rethinking of the notion of followership and a corresponding rewriting of the role of managers in which effective empowerment and delegation/devolution of decision-making authority and responsibility becomes an organizational norm. In this scenario the follower/leader dualism is dissolved and the widespread use of teams embracing collective/individual responsibilities becomes a key feature in high performing, dynamic organizations capable of rapid adaptability in chaotic complex business environments.

## **EFFECTIVE CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT**

The classical approach to management is one in which there is a strong embedded hierarchical command and control structure. Power and control is hierarchical; discipline is imposed from the top; decision-making is centralised and top-down; problem solving tends to be mechanistic; and, the management style is autocratic and position oriented. This classical model is still prevalent (Taborda, 1999).

The traditional bureaucratic model within managerial echelons discourages shared governance. Managers are primarily responsible for their own sections of the business and rarely interact with other



managers who are in turn solely responsible for their sections of the business (Smith, 1994). The traditional structure for example at General Motors in the United States was explicit in placing boundaries on management roles: ‘...managers down the line could make decisions within their own groups...but those with real impact on success or failure were made at headquarters’ (Smith 1994: 32).

Following on from this traditional model was a shift towards a human relations model. This is when some of the waves of participation occurred in the 1960s and 1970s that Ramsay (1977) refers to in his critique of this ‘turn’ in organizational workplace developments. In that era the traditional authority of management was under challenge. Managers learnt about the functioning of groups and teams (often when studying for MBAs) and there were moves made to increase the degree of participation by the workforce (Entrekin & Court 2001; Limerick & Cunnington 1989).

This was followed by a systems model of management and management developments in which the organization was viewed as a ‘loosely coupled’ system. It is supposedly the interconnectedness and interdependence of the units in the organization and the increasing size and complexity that requires ‘expert’ organizational control to be exercised. It is also assumed that the whole is more problematic than the parts and that senior management can better understand and control the parts than the whole (Limerick & Cunnington 1989:11).

What is happening currently? There is often a limited form of participation that recognizes the findings in Harley, Hyman and Thompson (2005) in which teams are used extensively—the breadth of participation is there but not the depth—but with ultimate authority, responsibility and power still in the hands of senior management elites (Marchington 2005). Despite calls for management roles to be altered the current trends are not positive.

Research does show that organizations that involve, empower and entrust their employees out-perform those that do not, yet the majority use more traditional forms of management. In addition, a recent survey of 2000 organizations—by the UK Economic and Social Research Council in their ‘future of work’ program—reveals some sombre findings. Firstly, that British management echelons are reluctant to provide family-friendly work environments; secondly, that more rather than fewer managers are being recruited within organizations despite the trends towards team-working; and, most

workers lack any effective voice within their current work arrangements (Anonymous 2003: 6). Even in the public sector with the dominance of the managerialist approach there is a trend towards greater centralisation of authority rather than decentralisation and devolution. This is exemplified by what is happening at Oxford University. The new Vice Chancellor—Dr. John Hood who was previously Vice Chancellor of Auckland University in New Zealand—has announced a managerial streamlining that transfers decision-making powers from individual colleges to a more centralised process. This change is argued to allow for ‘...decisions to be reached more quickly’ and to increase (apparently) transparency (Blair 2005: 27).<sup>4</sup>

What is needed is a reconstruction of management as a function in organizations. I argue for the use of the term managership, rather than management, because that role is still necessary particularly the elements of coordination and implementation and oversight of decisions relating to the allocation and use of financial and human resources within organizational units—the budget function. However, the ‘command and control’ focus has to be dissolved because that is the negative side of management that adds little or no value to organizations. In effect, I would argue, there is no continuing need for individuals to be vested with this function such that they have the primary or exclusive decision-making role(s). In this context the middle management layer is abolished and the remaining managers roles are changed from one of ‘command and control’ to one of ‘coach, internal consultant and communicator’. They act as ‘boundary riders’ helping to resolve disputes/decisions that cannot be resolved within teams and groups and providing (if required) professional development and support for these self-managing teams/groups.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Oxford University is setting up a 150 strong Academic Council from the individual colleges and faculty resulting in an ‘...end to parallel situations of separate collegiate and university decision-making...It is no longer possible to secure consistently within the institution the range of experience and knowledge for the exercise of good institutional governance’ (Blair 2005: 27). Apparently, only a professional senior management elite (the Vice Chancellor believes) can provide such capable decision-making processes.

<sup>5</sup> The case study of Svenska Handelsbanken a Swedish bank—with the most mature history of radical change in terms of decentralisation—that abandoned the use of budgets in 1972 is a stellar example of the benefits of devolution and delegation of decision-making responsibility (Hope & Fraser, 2003). It is the individual bank branches that are the decision-making centres in an organization that has achieved and sustained major organizational cultural change and transformation. Similar parallels can be seen in other case studies of successful major change and delegation of decision-making such as Ahsell (a Swedish wholesaler) and Leyland Trucks (a British truck manufacturer) (Hope & Fraser, 2003).

This new form of managership is one in which shared internal governance is the norm with full authority and responsibility for decision-making spread through all the layers of an organization. This then becomes the creation of an organizational ‘story’ of trust and mutual respect, co-determination, full participation and legitimate deep workplace innovation, involvement and development. This results in tangible benefits for the organization and the individual and collective participants who can then share in the rewards so generated.

## **UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT – CURRENT PRACTICE AND FUTURE HOPE**

The prevalent senior executive mindset favours a market forces, economic rationalist, top-down decision making approach to university management in Australia and overseas (Bessant 2002; Eveline 2004; Holloway 2004a, 2004b; Holloway & Holloway 2005; Thornton 2004; Tourish 2006; Yelder & Codling 2004). Handy (1986) asserts that organizations 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]’ (Yelder & Codling 2004: 320). 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 elite 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, p. 23).*

Given the claims of a ‘climate of fear’ amongst university staff (Bessant 2002)—partially I would argue from an over-management syndrome—my assessment is that a significant, quantum level of organizational change is necessary to embed any form of collaborative decision-making approach.

There have been case studies in tertiary sector change management decision-making which include major, or what Miller, Greenwood and Hinings (1997) refer to as quantum, restructuring changes (Glendon 1992; Ritter 1998) to minor change management in Murdoch University (van Rhyn and Holloway 2004). The common theme in these studies is a top-down, authoritarian approach to

decision-making. Glendon studied major longitudinal change—over an eight year period—of size reduction at Aston University in the UK where he was an academic at the time. The change process was a “...top-down change strategy” (1992, p. 67) driven primarily by the Vice-Chancellor “...a single key actor” (1992, p. 67). The process involved “...controlling resources and information flows and by managing uncertainty...with a virtual power vacuum beneath him...” (Glendon, 1992, p. 67).

Ritter (1998) was an Australian study of the creation of Charles Sturt University through the amalgamation of Riverina Murray Institute of Higher Education and the Mitchell College of Advance Education. She concluded that this was also a top-down change approach in which “...those driving it seek speed and efficiency to achieve homogeneity and central strength” (1998, p. 77) at the cost of consultation and effective consolidation. Ritter argued that this approach was perceived (by management) as offering “...effective strategies for achieving ends despite cultural constraints, but exacerbated negative staff reactions through interpretations of it in terms of power play and the pursuit of self-interest” (1998, p. 86).

The creation of the Murdoch Business School was another example of a top-down management driven change exercise (van Rhyne & Holloway, 2004, 2003). The basic idea promulgated by the then Executive Dean was to force the amalgamation of the School of Commerce and the School of Economics. Significant resistance from the affected staff plus intervention from other Heads of School and the staff union allowed for a more consultative process to carry through the ultimate change outcomes (2004, p. 8). The study concluded that the best approach to such change “...is one that actively involves all staff...allows full ownership...and engagement...and minimises the need to overcome resistance to change...” (van Rhyne & Holloway, 2004, p. 9).

Further papers in the areas of university leadership and governance as well as strategic and operational decision-making have come to similar conclusions (Thornton, 2005, 2004; Yelder & Codling, 2004; Holloway, 2004a, 2004b; Eveline 2004; Bessant, 2002; Newton, 2002; Baldwin, 1996). Even nine hundred years of self-government by the respective colleges at Oxford University is coming to an end (Halpin, 2005). The new Vice-Chancellor Professor John Hood—who was recently the VC at Auckland University in New Zealand—has argued that centralisation is “...necessary to modernise

decision-making and maintain Oxford's world-class status" (Halpin, 2005, P.29). This is 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. It is clearly evident that corporatisation and managerialism is pervasive in the higher education sector in Australia and overseas.

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 (Hellstrom 2003; Holloway 2004a, 2004b; Holloway and van Rhyne 2005; Stagich 1999; Yelder & Codling 2004). 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 organizational benefits (North 1990; Olesen 1967; Ostrom 1990).

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 in Australia is to blame for the policies that have produced this particular version of managerialism in Australian universities and that 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* organizations 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 organization 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 organizational success' (2006: 27).

This approach embodies the results of extensive research in the human resource management and organizational behaviour fields into entities that can be classified as high performing work organizations (HPWOs). These have outperformed their rivals over long periods of time (Collins 2001; Collins & Porras 2000; O'Reilly & Pfeffer 2000; Pfeffer 1998; Reichfield 2001; Thompson 2002; Tourish & Hargie 2004). These organizations are characterised by good communication processes; semi-autonomous work teams; effective employee participation; enhanced organizational 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 & O'Reilly 2000; Hannan, Baron, Hsu & Kocak 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 organizations 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 in 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...*

*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 organisations. Information is necessary for new order, an order we do not impose, but order nonetheless. All of life uses information this way (1999: 97).*

The above approach needs to be combined with both two-way and critical upward communication flows. Organizational 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 organizations fail largely because of insufficient participation and ineffective communication (Nutt 2002).

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

One of the further critical phases of further research will be to test this approach in different organization sectors and cultural contexts. The primary research framework utilised would be qualitative inquiry since this is process of significant organizational reform that would need the richness and depth of data and analysis that such a research program is more likely to deliver.

I anticipate that the corporate sector will be the first area to assess the applicability of these ideas and advocated changes to leadership, followership and managership. There is a competitive advantage incentive that may well propel organizations to follow examples such as Svenska Handelsbanken, Leyland Trucks, Borealis and Ahsell (Hope & Fraser, 2003). In fact these very organizations who have already progressed a significant distance down the change path would themselves be prime candidates for the further changes envisaged within this paper.

I expect, however, that the non-profit and public sectors would lag appreciably behind in making what would be perceived as a 'radical' departure from the prevailing economic rationalist, top-down decision-making system. However, one possibility for further research within Universities would be to analyse different institutions approaches to major/minor restructuring and change management processes. These are currently being undertaken across the higher education sector within Australia to manage the transition to more corporatised entities as public funding revenue sources continue to contract.

Another avenue for research will be to investigate this revised approach within different sizes of organizations. An existing small to medium enterprise (SME) would have fewer barriers to overcome. There would be fewer layers of entrenched, hierarchical management. The organizational mindset and culture is more likely to be entrepreneurial and experimental and usually all staff are already engaged, committed and involved heavily in the decision-making process. There has been less time for a bureaucratic demarcation of working responsibilities to develop. Everybody participates—one would expect. The larger the size and the more bureaucratic the culture are the very factors that would militate against an easier transition process.

Some specific industry sectors may be more predisposed to making the level of transformation required. The organizational culture in biotechnology, information technology, research oriented and, scientific institutions are already team and project oriented. Their focus is on effective decision-making and adaptability within highly chaotic and ever-changing environments. Their staff are highly educated, talented and usually committed to performing at optimal levels. These underlying

characteristics make these organizations suitable subjects for just such an intellectual and pragmatic 'turn'.

The applicability of these insights can also be linked with the research literature in the fields of organizational learning (Driver, 2002; Senge, 1990), sustainable business (Dunphy, 2003, 2000) and corporate social responsibility/corporate citizenship (United Nations, 2005, 2004). The common theme in these areas is the need to harness the existing talent of the staff in organizations and to move down some variation of an employee empowerment path.

## CONCLUSION

If these 'lessons' are understood to be part of an effective organizational learning process then universities can be proactive and ensure that they do effectively utilise all the embedded talent represented by their staff. The result would be enhanced and more robust organizational decision outcomes as well as a more engaged and committed workforce.

Many of these involve 'moves' towards ideas of workforce empowerment in which employees assume some or full measure of autonomy and discretion over what they do and how they do it (Ashmos & Duchon 2000; Mirvis 1997; Pfeffer 2001). This does raise a certain paradox. It is common for management consultants and senior management personnel to advocate work approaches that include greater participation and involvement by employees. The subsequent propositions often contain their own internal contradictions because they create programs '...whose successful implementation depends upon the use of hierarchy, unilateral control, and employee limited freedom' (Argyris 2001: x). Tourish and Hargie cogently argue that this is often limited to those at the top receiving just enough corrective input to the decision-making process. They state that: 'A unitarist focus is simply assumed, and a top-down strategy recommended – as part of the attempt to move organizations beyond top-down strategies' (2004a: 6).

Finally, universities need to move away from the 'heroic leadership' template and embrace a true workforce empowerment approach (Bisoux 2002; Ciulla 1998; James 2004). 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.

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