

## Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

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Hardy, Cynthia. (1996). *The Politics of Collegiality. Retrenchment Strategies in Canadian Universities*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press (Pp. 232). Price: \$42.95

Reviewed by Alexander D. Gregor, University of Manitoba.

Not too long ago, a book carrying this title would be one presumably aimed toward the esoteric guild of professional planners and managers. An intervening sea-change in public policy and government attitude, however, has – or should have – moved the issue of retrenchment into the office and consciousness of every member of the academy. Because this curiously atavistic term and its companions, like strategic planning, had until quite recently a rather specialized audience, the associated literature was not something that would easily engage the more general reader. In consequence, the larger postsecondary community is, to an unfortunate degree, without ready access to scholarly guidance in this area of increasing urgency. Cynthia Hardy's most recent book goes a considerable distance toward remedying that deficiency. What she offers is not instruction in the techniques of retrenchment *per se*; but she does provide an excellent introduction to the match between *context* (the special characteristics of a particular institution and its environment) and *planning and retrenchment strategy*. We are provided with a remarkably intelligible overview of the general theory associated with the latter, and, through six case-studies, a graphic illustration of how the efficacy of

such planning is dependent on a clear understanding of context. These studies provide a cautionary tale about the cavalier application of “canned” management strategies - even those demonstrably applicable to a university setting; and for those interested in the transformation of Canadian higher education during the last two decades, the insights provided about events in a number of the country's premier institutions will be of considerable interest (though incidental to the main purpose of the study itself). The author's very effective use of representative (albeit anonymous) quotations from the interviewees adds a richness and refreshingly human quality to the tales.

Hardy's study was prompted in large part by the spectre of government intervention in university retrenchment, and by the concomitant disposition to impose business-oriented management technique in the process. This trend toward *managerialism* is defined as one that “encompasses an increased emphasis on professional management, formal planning, systemic performance evaluation, centralized resource allocation, and directive leadership” (p. 3). It is Hardy's contention that such an approach has the general weakness of effectively ignoring the political dimension of change: in over-estimating the importance of leadership-at-the-top, and in assuming that “rational objectivity” can be the basis of decision-making; and it has the specific weakness of profoundly misunderstanding the character of a university. Principal among these misapprehensions is an assumption that the institution undertaking retrenchment strategies will share “a unitary perspective in which all interested parties are assumed to be bound together by a common goal” (p. 3). Hardy quite rightly appreciates that the absence of such a “unitary perspective” within the contemporary university is not a something to be remedied just by more effective communication, as the managerial model might suggest.

Disciplinary loyalties and “subcultures” notwithstanding, however, it is possible for the university to approach at least something like institution-wide *collaboration* and *consensus*. But these are to be attained only through the effective and appropriate exercise of power (or, under another rubric, *politics*). This critical leadership task – managing collegiality – requires not just an understanding of the nature of power itself

(in both its instrumental and its symbolic forms), but also an understanding of context: "...in order to identify the levers of change" (p. 191). What Hardy is attempting to provide, then, is an appreciation of the need for "discriminating management, not standardized management that ignores the complexity and diversity of life" (p. 203). To this end, she proposes to "[unmask] the rhetoric that surrounds collegiality and [show] it for what it is – a particular use of power that avoids conflict" (p. 204).

Hardy's choice of the case study approach seems particularly appropriate for this rather daunting task. (The methodology and rationale for her approach are instructively laid out as an appendix.) The institutions chosen (two from each of three provinces) are of very different histories and circumstances, and allow therefore for some intriguing comparisons and contrasts. From Quebec, McGill University and the Université de Montréal were chosen; from Ontario, the University of Toronto and Carleton; and from B.C., the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. (Hardy notes, by way of limitations, that the studies are, in effect, snap-shots of a particular time in the history - and leadership - of those institutions (*viz.*, the mid-1980's); that the snapshots are of events at the "macro" or institutional level; and that they restrict themselves to the academic sphere.)

Following an examination of how these individual institutions approached the demand for retrenchment, Hardy is able to move to an examination of current theoretical models of university governance and decision-making: the bureaucracy, the collegium, the political organization, and organized anarchy. (Within the permutations of these models, McGill is categorized as the "decentralized collegium," Carleton the "centralized collegium," Simon Fraser the "bureaucratic collegium," Montréal the "technocratic institution," Toronto the "federal bureaucracy," and UBC the "political university.") These models allow an interpretation of what happened at each of the six institutions – why each did things the way it did, and why the outcomes were so dramatically different. (In turn, the case studies provide the basis for some useful criticism of the models themselves, particularly as they apply to the university.) Because, in Hardy's view, "the sources of power are imbedded in context" (p. 164), the "ideal" models would never match a particular

institution in all aspects. Indeed, all of the institutions are arguably admixtures of two or more of those models, with one normally in a dominant role. But with the insights provided by those models, "the institutional context is not an impenetrable barrier to change but can be managed and mobilized in ways that allow change" (p. 146). To ignore those insights, and the lessons of context, is to invite self-inflicted wounds – as are detailed, for example, in the tales of UBC and Toronto. Somewhat heartening, however, is Hardy's observation that the "garbage can" model – "planning" by default – no longer appears to be a dominant model, at least among the sample institutions she reviewed. The author takes this as an encouraging sign that the new realities are indeed sinking in.

A particularly telling example of the danger of "generic assumptions" is provided in the very different role played by officers or committees carrying similar or identical labels across the range of institutions. Deans provide perhaps the most dramatic contrast: where they may be members of an institutional management team at one university, they can be marginalized unit CEO's at another. The form and content of strategic planning were demonstrably affected by this variable, as they were by similar differences in the role of budget advisory committees, senates, boards, and faculty associations. Hardy also makes some very useful observations about the distinction we must draw between *structures* and *processes*. In the planning exercise, we may too easily become so concerned with the former as to ignore the latter; and yet, to take an important example, *decentralization* cannot be assumed to translate automatically into collegiality. In this regard, the author can point us to examples, among the case studies, of centralized collegiality and decentralized bureaucracy.

The author, a professor of management at McGill university, has published extensively in the area of university decision-making and is an internationally recognized expert in the area. In this most current book, however, Hardy takes great pains to note that she is not attempting to provide a strategic planning manual. Her hope is that the book will leave us with an enhanced sense of what must be considered in the change process (in this case, change toward retrenchment): "...the aim is to provide university actors with a way of seeing patterns that will help them

to make sense of the complexity in which they operate. In doing so, a sensitivity can be developed that helps actors to better understand how they can *mobilize* context and the power embedded within it to influence outcomes in a particular institution" (p. 182). In this Hardy succeeds splendidly, and provides a study that could and should be read with profit by both administrators and faculty. Just as importantly, it should be taken very seriously as a cautionary tale by all those outside the academy who might too easily be tempted to employ the inappropriate instruments of *managerialism* in the quite appropriate search for accountability and responsiveness. As Hardy cautions: "The university setting turns formal controls into blunt instruments that may do as much to provoke conflict as to contain it" (p. 9).

*The Politics of Collegiality* provides an excellent - and very timely - model of management scholarship being made accessible and relevant to a general readership. Given the importance of what Hardy has to offer, it is an opportunity we can but hope is widely seized.



Masters, D.C. (1995). *Henry John Cody: An Outstanding Life*. Toronto: Dundurn Press (Pp. x, 342).

Reviewed by Paul J. Stortz, Higher Education Group, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Many books included on library shelves which deal with university history must be approached with caution. They can be horribly pedantic and dry, with a strict chronological and untheoretical structure that stretches the patience of even the most avid reader. Such works inspire vivid recollections of high school history with its seemingly meaningless facts and dates, leaving one with only a hope for a work with an argumentative foundation, and by nature, a more intellectually engaging read. Although recent studies on the development of higher education institutions in Canada have succeeded quite admirably in eschewing this