



Gornall, L., Thomas, B., & Sweetman, L. (Eds.). (2018). Exploring consensual leadership in higher education: Co-operation, collaboration and partnership. London, England: Bloomsbury.

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This is the third book that I have reviewed in the series, *Perspectives on Leadership in Higher Education*, published by Bloomsbury. The book is written within the context of leadership involving interconnectivity with staff and building consensus on future strategies to embrace the issues confronting universities. The book is written around the challenges facing universities in an increasingly corporatised environment facing challenges of marketisation, internationalisation and the need to agree on approaches to deal with increasing global complexity and fragmentation. It is interesting to reflect on styles of leadership across society in the current era. At the highest political levels, we are finding it increasingly difficult to build a majority consensus on approaches to things like climate change, migration and economic policy settings. Politics in democratic societies have become dominated by populist politicians and coalitions of minority groups pushing for individual agendas rather than a collective agenda as may have been apparent in the past. In other parts of the world, authoritarian rule has been strengthened.

Within an institutional setting we can also observe various leadership styles ranging from some presidents and vice chancellors of universities that take a very authoritarian command approach to their role as opposed to those that still operate on a very collegial and democratic decision-making process. In my experience, I feel that the universities have generally moved more towards a command approach with the more democratic or collegial academic decision-making being left to the more operational elements of research, scholarship, teaching and learning. Collegial responses are generally now only an input into how to collectively deal with the high-level issues of internationalisation, commercialisation, the business development of the university, and the emerging corporate nature of universities themselves.

This book edited by Gornall, Thomas and Sweetman explores consensual leadership in higher education, and focuses on the themes: Co-operation, Collaboration and Partnership. In the introduction, the authors do note that privatisation and marketisation of higher education have created a more

competitive environment for institutions. Also, business management and strategy seem to have displaced pedagogy from its essential role within the life of the university. Indeed, as education becomes commoditised, marketed and sold to diverse groups of students, domestically and internationally, pedagogy runs the risk of becoming simply an input into the production process. Education becomes a commodity rather than a central feature in developing the unique characteristics of particular universities. Financial, not academic, success ultimately becomes the measure of institutional performance in this setting. Further, as the editors note, in an increasingly corporate and managerial setting, management risks becoming more authoritarian and rigid at the expense of collegial decision-making.

Similar to other books in the series, this book is a collection of case studies, research, discussion and debate, studying and presenting qualities of leadership, and building the case that leadership needs to be more consensually based than authoritarian command based.

The subject of the book is highly relevant to academics working in managerial positions within universities. As the editors note, it covers the tensions between the role of the manager of the new higher education *business* and the role of the scholar in promoting creativity, academic free thinking and research. This is no more evident than when we consider the chair of the faculty which in many universities was rotated amongst the professoriate within the faculty with each serving their term. Decision-making was largely made by the faculty as a group and indeed the appointment of the chair of the faculty was very much the domain of the faculty as a collegiate group. This has changed in many countries and many institutions, whereby the chair of the faculty is appointed by the executive of the University with key performance indicators linked to financial viability, student numbers, research rankings, research grants and volume of output from academic staff. Rather than being leadership rotated around colleagues, the head of the faculty has become a line manager appointed by higher level executives, using head hunting firms, with the achievement of corporate objectives as their prime aim.

The book is divided into three sections and a conclusion. The first part is on co-operation followed by collaboration and then partnership. The concluding chapter reflects on whether academics could learn from musicians about creative leadership and collaboration, a very interesting spin on the subject.

The first part on co-operation begins with a case study based in Nigeria, considering the co-operation between universities and industrial groups in Nigeria. The author concludes that co-operation in higher education is inextricably linked to participative leadership and trust. Without these elements, co-operation becomes lack of co-operation. Indeed, organisational trust enhances staff behaviour and overall inventiveness, encouraging team building. It is argued that this is a foundation for more effective collaboration and it supports effective co-operation with bodies external to the organisation.

The second chapter in this part reflects upon the work experiences of young academics in Finland. The authors note that early career academics enter into a system which cherishes competition, productivity measurement and individual success. Through interviewing a sample of early career academics, the authors investigated what is good versus bad co-operation and concluded that real and true co-operation is highly valued by the early career academics studied. To further drill down on this finding, they looked to three dimensions of co-operation: cognitive, social and moral. Within this context, the authors concluded that these dimensions lead to an inherently rewarding and motivating experience through co-operation in academic work. It was also noted that within the current managerial culture of universities, increased co-operation amongst academics can create value and enhance the lives of those in academia and providing benefits to society at large.

The third chapter in part one examines departmental relationships in three Spanish institutions. The authors developed a set of dilemmas encountered by managers in a range of institutional settings. These included leadership dilemmas and governance dilemmas. It was recognised that many of the leadership dilemmas are focused on people and conflicting values. Overall, they find two main sources of dilemmas, one inherent to the individual and the other focused on the organisation. From an individual perspective, it is argued that the major dilemmas flow from how a person works with colleagues to achieve their objectives and the organisation's objectives, whereas the dilemmas flowing from organisational structures are inherent in the structures themselves. This leads to managers operating within very complicated interpersonal and organisational settings. The authors present a case for co-operation inside and outside of the organisation as being a prime mechanism to overcome dilemmas inherent in university management in the face of external and internal pressures.

The final chapter in part one explores co-operative approaches to teaching and learning in a UK setting. The author concludes that much of the co-operation evident in universities is a function of the broader co-operative movement itself.

The second part of the book considers collaboration and includes case studies from Canada, the UK and Spain. The first chapter of this part looks at leadership responses to the more competitive external environment that universities face. There is considerable discussion of values and human skills needed to bring people along with leaders to ensure that there is consensus and support for leadership as it faces difficult decisions in an increasingly complex environment.

The second chapter in this part is concerned with knowledge creation within universities and in particular social sciences. It focuses attention on the situation where students are both students and colleagues working as research assistants. This creates an environment where the notion of consensual leadership requires careful consideration through tensions like student – teacher, research leader – early stage researcher, and supervisor – staff. The authors conclude a consensual consent is critical for the work in research and research training, especially where involving mentoring and support for early-stage researchers.

In the third chapter of part two, Spanish research groups are subject to case analysis. The researchers studied the social structure of the research groups to see how the structure has been created and the role of leadership. They note that from the outside, these groups look to be more command style environments. However, from within, they found that relationships are both supported and social, with consent and mutual respect at the heart of the operation of the groups.

The final chapter in this part takes a more theoretical approach to leadership and collaboration through a case study of a well-established higher education institution. The author looks at the dynamics of networks within the institutions and finds the emergence of collaborative leadership as the institution faces the challenges of moving from traditional higher education delivery towards electronic delivery and distance learning.

Part three of the book considers partnership, where partnership is viewed as involving longer term relationships than those found in the previous parts on co-operation and collaboration. The first chapter considers the situation in Chile within the context of the colonial history of the country and the emergence of marketisation of higher education. The authors note that in some respects, the chapter is concerned about disruption of the consensual model and inertia in sticking to a western style for the academy reflecting the experience of staff returning from study and research overseas.

The second chapter takes us out of education and looks at the environment within service sector centres in the United Kingdom. It is observed that this style of workplace puts humans into a machine type environment. It is acknowledged that it is hard to see how consensual leadership could be developed within such an environment. Notwithstanding this environment, the researchers sought to consider what it would be like to change relationships within such a centre through encouraging leaders to become more consensual, involving and empowering teams, and involving frontline staff in decision-making – in effect, creating a partnership

between leaders and workers.

In the next chapter, four individual authors bring the experiences of working abroad from four different countries: Australia, Japan, China, and the UK. Each of the authors was seen to be the 'on-loan' international scholar within their overseas organisational setting. They note that it is difficult for the incoming scholar to fit within the host institution, even though they are expected to take a role in infusing a different way of doing things with a view towards improvements. There is an observed contradiction in that the purpose is to inject new thinking as a visiting scholar in that they faced resistance from existing staff.

The final chapter in this part is written by two members of the editorial team and one of their colleagues. They reflect on relationships that they have built in the past to build partnerships. Some of the experiences they referred to as 'the time of their life to be celebrated'. However, there were other instances where there were problems or difficulties through misunderstandings, poor partner choice and ultimately a waste of resources.

The editors' aim was that the final four chapters in the last section of the book on partnership would lead to more discussion of how leadership evolves in different environmental settings and it succeeds in providing key issues for discussion. If we take a step back and contemplate approaches to leadership in an era where education institutions are confronting commoditisation of the learning, internationalisation of marketing, competitive

pressures for grant income, and global ranking systems for research outputs, it seems inevitable that some leaders will revert to an authoritarian approach. Experienced managers sometimes revert to a command approach through lacking in confidence in their ability to elicit the consensus required in a more democratic style. However, the basic nature of the academies is such that high value is placed upon scholarship, research, learning and teaching. Traditionally, these have been best delivered in a community of scholars working together rather than in a command style setting. Personally, I have never found an authoritarian approach to management to work, so it's no surprise to me that a book like this which outlines cooperation, collaboration, and partnership as critical elements in building a leadership style is based upon consensus. Furthermore, there is no surprise that effective consensual leadership involves creativity in both being creative and creating an environment for creativity. This is where the final chapter comes into play, drawing on experiences from jazz musicians in fostering improvisation and applying the principles to higher education settings.

Overall, the book may seem quite common sense to readers in that the settings of universities are more conducive to collaboration and consensual leadership approaches. Notwithstanding that, the pressures on senior leadership within universities may lead them to try more authoritarian approaches. The book therefore is a valuable contribution providing well-researched support for the key elements of consensual leadership and a timely reminder of the value of the approach.