The influence of universities’ organizational features on professorial intellectual leadership

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This research examines the intellectual leadership behaviours of senior academics at professoriate level, and the influences of institutional support practices, climate and communication in universities as main organizational features on these behaviours. To explore relations among research variables, qualitative data were collected by interviews with Australian senior academics, and analysed by using content and descriptive analysis techniques. According to senior academics, major professorial leadership behaviours are creating new knowledge, keeping up standards in disciplinary publications, helping younger researchers' academic development, obtaining competitive grants, raising the reputation of their institutions and using their expertise to influence public debates. In addition, senior academics confirmed that institutional resources contribute generally to their productivity within scholarly leadership, and organizational climate strongly affects their motivation and academic performance. Furthermore, they affirmed that organizational communication has greater impact on their intellectual leadership by its reflections on climate and institutional facilities in universities than its direct effects.

**Keywords:** professoriate; intellectual leadership; organizational communication; organizational climate; institutional support practices

Introduction

Leadership is one of the most prominent topics within the literature of organizational theory and management; it has been discussed for a long time in terms of individuals’ personal characteristics and behaviours, conditions in organizations, leader–follower interactions and power relations in formal and informal structures. Leadership discourses historically started with ‘The Great Man’ approach, and most leadership theories emphasized the leadership of one person as ‘Heroic Leader’ (Northouse 2007). In line with these theories, leadership literature in higher education has been dominated by studies which have focused on the characteristics and behaviours of formal academic leaders in universities like vice-chancellors, presidents, rectors, deans and department heads (Macfarlane and Chan 2014).
programmes for leadership development, interdisciplinary structuring, internal grant variety, and institutional resources to facilitate disciplinary associations and journals.

**Conclusion**

This paper offers a further exploration of professorial intellectual leadership based on the self-assessments of senior academics who have various academic or managerial duties at different disciplines in Australian high-ranked universities. Australian senior academics also reported their perceptions about organizational features of their developed and well-known universities. Their opinions provide opportunities to understand the influence of institutional resources, general climate and organizational communication on their intellectual leadership.

In the first instance; no matter what their gender, disciplinary backgrounds, and academic or managerial roles, Australian senior academics generally asserted that professorial intellectual leadership is composed of producing new knowledge, keeping up disciplinary standards in scholarly publications, helping the career advancement of their younger colleagues, uplifting the brand of their institutions and contributing to the solution of social issues. All of these behaviours are well-matched with the six dimensions developed by Macfarlane (2011) in his study of full professors from the UK universities. This consistency can be caused by the strong similarities between Australian and the UK higher education institutions in terms of both academic and organizational structures.

However, Australian senior academics firstly mentioned research leadership (including income generation) and mentorship behaviours as primary components of their intellectual leadership. This might be the result of the institutional expectations in line with the preponderant performative culture in their high-ranked universities (Macfarlane 2011). They also prefer to use the term ‘Steward’, readily proposed in Macfarlane’s (2012) book *Intellectual Leadership in Higher Education: Renewing the Role of the University Professor*, instead of the term ‘Guardian’. This embraces their desire to contributions to the disciplinary advancement by creating and disseminating knowledge, editing and reviewing scholarly productions and taking responsibilities in academic committees. Moreover, we consider that, as an alternative name for ‘Acquisitor’ used in Macfarlane’s (2012) book, ‘Enabler’ reflects better both assisting financially the studies of students and ECAs by providing leadership in obtaining research grants; helping their future career advancement by introducing them as co-presenters/authors on disciplinary platforms; and establishing relations between younger researchers and well-known academics. Furthermore, we suggest that being a role model, by setting good examples with not only their scholarly enthusiasm and endeavour but also their personal characteristics and behaviours, is a broader concept which covers all sorts of professorial intellectual leadership.

Additionally, similar to the findings in the study of Bentley et al. (2013), Australian senior academics agreed that, as an ordinary part of the universities’ work environment, institutional support practices promote their scholarly leadership, especially for their publication and grant achievements. However, they argued that some academic trainings and quality assurance operations could lead to unnecessary time consumption for academics. In addition, we realized that senior academics from younger universities defined quality assurance and performance management systems in their institutions as informative, even supportive, while senior academics from older universities accepted similar operations as oppressive, bureaucratic implementations. In this regard, as well
their intellectual leadership. However, our analysis was restricted to qualitative data collected from the limited number of associate professors and full professors from only high-ranked Australian universities. Thus, it is obvious that the relations between professorial intellectual leadership and the organizational variables in this research need to be re-examined by empirical studies in various participant groups from different types of universities. Moreover, the influence of other potential organizational variables specified by our sample such as career planning, promotion procedures, and leadership trainings on professorial intellectual leadership can be the subject of further studies carried out, using different research methods.

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