

## Book Reviews

*Academic Administration: A Quest for Better Management and Leadership in Higher Education*, by Sheying Chen (Editor), New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009, 313 pp., ISBN: 978-1-60741-732-3.

This book, edited by Professor Sheying Chen, is a compendium of 20 chapters on aspects of University administration and leadership. It is part of a collection entitled "Education in a Competitive and Globalizing World Series". The bulk of the contributors are from the United States; this should not be surprising given the prominence of the US Higher Education system. One is reminded of the Baseball World Series which is the premier competition for this sport but with "world series" being somewhat of a misnomer given that it is a US competition and not a global one. Indeed, the content of this book reflects this dichotomy. Only three of the 20 chapters are from outside the US system. Moreover, most of the contributors seem to be from the mid-west and the institutions represented are not perhaps "Major League" players, nor are they "Ivy League". However, we should concentrate on the content rather than the form.

The book claims to provide a comprehensive review of administrative, academic and related areas in higher education linked to teaching, research and service and that it aims to be a textbook for new and aspiring academic administrators as well as those taking higher education related majors. This is a large claim but, to an extent, the book does succeed. One could wish for a more historical scope and certainly for a more global one. It is a pity that the book came out before "*Herding Cats*" (Garrett and Davies, 2010) which should be a reference for all involved in higher education administration (albeit there is a chapter by Taylor on 'herding cats') and it is certainly an omission that "*Microcomographia Academica*" (Cornford, 1908) is not referenced since that is a seminal work no academic administrator should be without.

The contributions in Part I, provided by academics and administrators in different positions within university hierarchies, are somewhat anecdotal but nevertheless interesting. Pierce's chapter, which focuses on "leading from the middle", is useful for less senior administrators.

Part II looks at the core areas of academic affairs and covers such matters as student success, technical and mathematical education, graduate and professional education, including Professor Richard Taylor's "Herding Cats, Administering University Continuing Education in the UK" which is perhaps of most interest to readers of this Journal. Taylor is, of course, the doyen of continuing education in the UK, having led Continuing Education at Leeds and Cambridge.

He makes some very cogent observations. First, that in his long experience (over 40 years) continuing education has been under severe pressure, both financial and administrative; this is probably true worldwide. Secondly, “managing continuing education is complex and difficult” but yet that continuing education “can be the most fulfilling, progressive and worthwhile higher education in contemporary societies”. He comments on the nomenclature of continuing education which has changed much over the period from adult to continuing, to lifelong, and so forth and points to fundamental reasons behind this—the diversity and heterogeneity of the field and the important point that continuing education is a field of practice rather than a discipline while, insofar as it is a discipline, it is inherently multi-disciplinary. Taylor describes also the differences in the UK between the “old” universities in which continuing education was essentially marginal (the Extra-Mural Department or School of Continuing Education) and the “new” universities where continuing education was more central to the mission across units in the institutions. He concludes that, nonetheless, continuing education survived because of its diversity and in part because those involved in CE saw it not just as a university phenomenon but part of a wider pattern of support for adult learners. He also emphasizes the importance of academic and administrative inputs to continuing education provision but essentially that it must be underpinned by academic culture rather than service culture and certainly not regarded as a cash cow for the institution. He stresses the importance of consensus in the operation and of engagement with the local community.

His conclusion is optimistic. Despite the challenges and disappointments involved in the story of continuing education in the UK, this is nevertheless offset by “the sheer pleasure of teaching and interacting with adult learners”. In other words, the role of continuing education as a social movement makes it worthwhile. Professor Taylor’s summary therefore is valuable, sobering and challenging but yet not pessimistic.

The third part of the book relates to Institutional Excellence and Academic Leadership and looks at measures of institutional effectiveness and the role of QA processes by regional and accreditation agencies. The reader from outside the US, which places less emphasis on formal quality assurance structures, will find this a contrast to the prominence of quality assurance agencies and regimes in the rest of the world. Cheng’s chapter on assessment is also a most interesting one with a thoughtful piece on the role of assessment in the competitive market as an indicator of output and of the value added of higher education. This section also contains an interesting contribution by Cecilia Chan and Albert Chau of the University of Hong Kong on service learning and civic education.

Finally, we turn to the concluding section where Professor Chen draws together the various themes of the work in a comprehensive way and a final chapter by

White and Hitt on the potential for educational leadership to become a discipline of its own which, whilst a worthy aim, does not make a wholly sustainable case.

In conclusion therefore it is a useful book, a world series in the US context but not in the global context that many of us now inhabit. The US system is without doubt the most important higher education sector globally, but is not the only sector and more reference to global influences could have been profitable. Should it be a textbook for aspiring academic administrators? It is certainly a good read and can be commended to junior, aspiring and even established academic administrators and leaders.

## References

- Cornford, F.M. (1908). *Microcosmographia Academia: Being a guide for the young academic politician*. Bowes and Bowes: Cambridge.
- Garrett, G. and Davies, G. (2010). *Herdng Cats: Being advice to aspiring academic and research leaders*. Triarchy Press: Axminster (UK).

John Cribbin  
The University of Hong Kong  
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China  
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