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Some implications of "public/private" space for professional identities in higher education

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Abstract

The interplay of public and private sector dynamics in higher education has impacted not only on the roles and identities of academic staff, but also on those of professional staff, who often have the task of bringing together, and achieving congruence between, activities that are geared towards the public good and also towards more commercially oriented enterprise. In this context, a new cadre of 'blended professionals' has emerged, whose roles include initiatives associated with the social responsibilities of institutions to their communities, as well as more market-oriented, income generating projects (Whitchurch 2008, 2009). This paper reports on case material relating to a sub-set of these staff, working specifically in the area of Community and Business Partnership, and on the impact of their work for traditional management structures and relationships. It will be argued that, although unlikely to be acknowledged in formal accounts of the university such as organisation charts or institutional plans, these staff are responsible for providing and maintaining a framework that holds together more publicly oriented strands of activity, such as widening participation, with more privately oriented strands, such as enterprise. In so doing, they make extensive use of

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multi-professional team- and networking with a range of colleagues, both inside and outside the university, not only helping to re-balance their institutions, but also to protect them against undue organisational fragmentation and bureaucracy. They therefore contribute to an increasingly 'mixed economy' of broadly based portfolios of activity. The implications of these 'public/private' spaces and activities for professional identities are explored in the context of institutional management.

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