

# Navigating your way through a professional staff career

***Managing Your Career in Higher Education Administration* by Michelle Gander, Heather Moyes & Emma Sabzalieva. The Universities into the 21st Century series, Noel Entwistle & Roger King (series Eds).**



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Reviewed by Carroll Graham

Reading the title caused me some anticipation. Here finally, I hoped, was a book that addressed the issues facing professional staff in managing their careers in higher education. However, the word 'administration' caused me some concern: was this a book so firmly rooted in the UK experience that it would be of little relevance in the Australian context? Happily, I found there is much of interest and relevance for the Australian reader – for those working as a professional staff in higher education, those considering such a career, and those (including academics) managing these staff.

As the authors comment, this book 'is structured in such a way that you can read it from start to finish, or you can dip into it at various times to help you with a particular question' (p. 8). While based on the authors' experiences, it is underpinned, where needed, by 'research-based conceptual analysis' (Entwistle & King, 2014, p. xiv). The book also includes several case studies that illustrate key points, enriching the material presented. Thus, this book is an interesting, easy-to-read, practical guide, which is based on sound research.

Of particular relevance to those new to working in higher education is the chapter on 'Working in a University'. As mentioned above, this does have a UK perspective; nevertheless, there are home truths in this chapter for those of us working in Australian universities. For example, the tension between the Humboltian research-focus imperative and the teaching-focused tradition established in medieval times is still clearly evident, both in Australia and in the UK. It is important 'for those seeking to pursue or develop a career in higher education administration... to be aware that this fundamental tension around what universities should be doing persist[s] to this day' (p. 14). This chapter also touches on the tension of the 'academic-administrative divide', which is clearly evidenced by

readers' comments to the *Times Higher Education* spoof, *The Poppletonian* newsletter (p. 23). While a number of Australian authors have suggested that we need to move beyond this divide (see for example, Sharafizad *et al.*, 2011; Conway, 2012; Graham, 2014), recent commentary suggests, unfortunately, that the divide is alive and thriving (Thornton, 2014).

The third and fourth chapters suggest practical activities for career enhancement, through developing skills and experience (Chapter 3) and using the opportunities of networking (Chapter 4). Suggestions for skill and knowledge development include gaining relevant formal qualifications, and undertaking continuing professional development in both 'hard' skills and leadership. Options for gaining experience cover secondments, international experience, relevant external experience and participating in professional associations. Use of existing networks – real-life and virtual – and creating your own, are discussed. Also provided are useful techniques for mapping your networks, suggestions for moving outside your comfort zone, and for managing your personal brand. While not guaranteeing that the reader of these chapters will progress to becoming a registrar or deputy vice-chancellor, developing your knowledge, skills, experience and networks can 'enhance your ability to do any job with a deeper understanding, enjoyment and motivation' (p. 74).

The Good Manager (Chapter 5) considers a range of management structures as they apply to professional staff – an academic as line manager, 'dotted line' managers, locally embedded roles with central managers, and matrix management – and how to make the most of any management relationship. Love it or hate it, management is a significant proportion of the work undertaken in universities; however, many people find themselves thrust into management roles without prior training. In

this context, this chapter is important for its analysis of what it takes to be a good manager of professional staff – and is essential reading for both prospective managers and current managers, be they professional or academic staff. The following chapter focuses on the less formal relationships of mentor and coach, and explores the key features of these different roles and the benefits that each can bring at different stages in your career. This chapter discusses effective mentors and mentoring, noting that it's optimal to have different mentors for different purposes and at different times in your career. Mentors can also use tips from this chapter to enhance their mentoring skills. The discussion of coaching includes coaching by line managers and how to make coaching work for you. Again, coaches will benefit from the advice provided here; however, importantly – as coaching puts the coachee in the driver's seat – there is a section on how to be a good coachee.

The final chapter considers how to define a successful career as a professional staff member, commenting on both intrinsic and extrinsic success. To illustrate possible career paths, the three authors provide their own career maps. As I have found, these examples highlight the need for consistent changing of roles, combined with significant levels of professional development, for career progression. Likewise, I agree with the authors that serendipity and

being brave plays a large part in the development of any career. Finally, if you want to get straight into developing your career (or someone else's), useful action lists are provided for staff at junior, middle and senior levels.

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## References

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