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Reflections on the role of the business school dean

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# REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL DEAN

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	3
<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Do business school deans really matter?</b> .....	5
<b>Horses for courses: Contingency perspectives</b> .....	6
<b>Aims</b> .....	7
<b>Theoretical frameworks</b> .....	8
<b>Research methods</b> .....	10
<b>Findings</b> .....	11
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	25
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	25

## **Our thanks to the author**

We are grateful to **Dr Julie Davies** for her work in producing this report whilst working for the Association in her position as Deputy Chief Executive.

# Reflections on the role of the business school dean

## FOREWORD BY PROFESSOR SUE COX



Business schools in the UK represent an influential and dynamic sector. They transform the wellbeing of individuals and large, medium and small-sized organisations. With our significant export value, continuous professional development activities and external relations work, we are able to complement high-income projects that big science and other academic units may be better positioned to attract. Moreover, with the densest number of triple accredited business schools in the world, we communicate a powerful message in the UK and beyond that we take the business of business schools seriously.

Through my international involvement with professional and accrediting bodies, links with industry, students and boards, I recognise that the benefits associated with working in business schools are legion. I fully support the Chartered Association of Business Schools which has always been active in policy work, capacity building, and networking. Additionally, I gain enormous pleasure from mentoring colleagues who have subsequently become deans or taken on other leadership roles in business schools.

As I step down in October from being dean for the past 20 years in two business schools, I am heartened by the talented people I meet in UK business schools. Many of my colleagues have a genuine drive to support students and organisations for local and national growth agendas, underpinned by high quality professional management education and research. I very much welcome this new report that brings together insights from a range of business school deans. These reflections are intended to enhance learning about our own practices. I hope this report will encourage aspiring and incumbent deans and leaders at all levels in the sector to enjoy the tremendous opportunities open to us. I hope it will support colleagues to be confident and thoughtful about ways to stimulate debate and innovation and to be more impactful in how we lead our own academic enterprises.

**Professor Sue Cox OBE**, former Dean of Lancaster University Management School 2001-2015, EFMD Vice-President, Trustee of the Work Foundation, and Companion and former Chair of the Association of Business Schools

## Executive Summary

This project investigated the motivations, expectations, and challenges of university-based business school deans. Consistent messages communicated were that business school deans are under constant pressure to increase revenues, rankings, and reputation through accreditations. They are aggregators and integrators operating in professional schools that are distinct in terms of the size and scale of international students, premium programmes, and range of activities. In the UK there is a trend towards the recruitment of PVC/executive deans and structural changes in the consolidation of larger academic units with services centralised in the university. This has the advantage of deans being closer to the VC with pan university responsibilities but it means they may be removed from operational details and students. Paradoxically, business schools are required by business school accreditation bodies to demonstrate autonomy and their institutions are demanding more international students yet schools are grappling with local centralisation of admissions and other processes over which they sometimes have little control to achieve their targets.

The current drive for inter-disciplinarity, impact, and greater embeddedness in the university and society through activities such as entrepreneurship provide business school deans with more opportunities for collaboration and mutual intellectual exchanges beyond merely providing financial cross subsidies to other departments. By integrating the strengths of the host university (in particular where the parent brand is stronger), a business school dean may be

better placed to differentiate the business school. According to AACSB's 2014-15 survey, the number one challenge for UK deans is faculty recruitment and retention. A major challenge for UK VCs is the small pool of individuals who are interested in becoming dean of a business school. For those who do step up to the role, it seems that the business school deanship is often an unplanned career move. It represents a demanding, albeit rewarding role to sustain.

We conclude that business school deans are 'reticulists', i.e. 'individuals who are especially sensitive to and skilled in bridging interests, professions and organizations' (Webb, 1991: 231). We suggest that there is scope for deans to be more visible in the media and social media and to develop skills in corporate and public relations as boundary spanners, intermediaries, and ambassadors.

Five recommendations emerged from this study:

- (1) There needs to be a greater understanding of how deans and business schools can contribute to the wider university.
- (2) Peer-to-peer support mechanisms need to be promoted.
- (3) Provide more evidence based leadership development for deans as visible boundary spanners, intermediaries, and ambassadors.
- (4) Career management support needs to be enhanced.
- (5) The business school leadership pipeline needs to be supported.

## Introduction

This paper explores the views of university-based business school deans. In particular, it highlights current challenges perceived by a range of deans mainly in the UK, as well as perspectives from Australia, China, France, Malaysia, New Zealand, Sweden, and the USA.

The report is structured as follows: First, we argue that deans are important strategic actors. Second, we highlight key contingencies impacting on the deanship. The next two

sections state the report's aims and research questions. This is followed by an outline of a theoretical framework of middle managers' strategic roles and literature on hybrid leaders and pracademics that shaped the study. We then explain the research design and present key findings. Finally, we make recommendations for policy and practice, for further investigation and interventions at individual, institutional, and industry levels.

## Do business school deans really matter?

Alongside questions about the legitimacy of business and management education (Thomas and Cornuel, 2012), concern has been expressed about a leadership deficit (Bradshaw, 2015) in business schools with increasingly high levels of turnover of deans. Mergers between universities and consolidations within them have produced academic units in the UK of sizeable faculties/colleges. This has led to the enlarged roles of the PVC/executive dean.

Curiously, business schools often claim to produce future leaders, however, research on the role of the business school dean has been neglected. A major jam session facilitated by Boston University in 2014 on business education indicated that good leaders should demonstrate the following attributes: thinking globally, crossing boundaries, collaborating, thinking critically, being creative and innovative, learning continuously, understanding systemic impacts and leading with courage and integrity.

Previous studies of academic leaders have explored the roles of vice chancellors (Breakwell and Tytherleigh, 2008), associate deans (Floyd and Preston, 2014), and heads of department (Smith, 2002; Floyd and Dimmock, 2011). Bryman (2007) reviewed the literature on higher education leadership. Yet with a few exceptions (such as Dawson, 2008; Fragueiro and Thomas, 2011; Thomas and Thomas, 2011), business school deanship has been largely unexplored even though business and management studies in the UK, USA and Australia, represents the most popular subject in universities. If business schools matter to

the higher education sector, at least financially and in terms of student numbers, then it must be assumed that business school deans are important players.

What leadership capabilities are required to shape an academic enterprise that moulds future leaders in other sectors? It seems timely that first-order perspectives from the lived experiences of business school deans are given a voice. We need to understand their experiences in different contexts, individuals' motivations, and future prospects for this cadre of individuals. This report aims to add to the work on leadership in higher education by analysing the perceptions of 35 deans in different settings as intermediaries between broad sets of stakeholders. At the same time, in a post heroic age we recognise the importance of distributed leadership.

This paper contributes to the capacity building activities of the Chartered Association of Business Schools, AACSB International, EFMD and other professional bodies that represent the business school community, as well as policy makers and researchers on higher education. The insights gained from specific examples can inform a broader understanding of the recruitment and selection of business school deans, their development and career trajectories. These findings may also be of interest to head hunters and those hiring deans, current incumbents, aspiring deans, and their colleagues. It is hoped that the respondents also found the interviews and survey valuable opportunities to reflect on their own practices.

## Horses for courses: Contingency perspectives

The answer to 'what is the business school dean's role?' very much depends on national and institutional contexts. In continental Europe and parts of Asia the internal rotation of a professor is one model, while in other circumstances a global search is conducted by a head hunter for an executive dean. There is a more presidential model in leading US business schools where the dean is mainly responsible for fund and profile raising. The balance of a dean's attention to internal operations, strategic issues and external relations relates to an organisation's specific history, predecessor effect, the stage in the tenure of the VC, and the size and scale of the business school. Self-perceptions may also be influenced by whether there is a regional regeneration remit and if a business school is located in a research intensive environment. Clearly, at different points in their evolution institutions need different types of deans: turnaround specialists, change agents, disruptors, enablers, healers, research superstars, or business facing individuals. Changes in the titles of these strategic business units reflect shifts in deans' mandates, e.g. School of Business and Society, School of Business and Entrepreneurship.

The UK has the highest density of triple accredited business schools in the world and represents significant expertise in business school accreditations and leadership. Currently there are 21.5 women deans in 121 business schools (including one in Northern Ireland, 3.5 in Scotland where one is a co-head and none in Wales (*accurate in June 2015*). There is only one current female VC, at the University of South Wales, who has been associate dean in a business school). There has been a recent trend for deans at leading business schools such as at Cass, Imperial College, and Oxford to be appointed from the USA. Unlike in the

USA, there are no deans born in India, however, there is one female Chinese born dean and several from mainland Europe such as Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal and rare individuals from Australia and Canada. Occasionally, UK deans become deans overseas, for example, with recent moves to Australia, Belgium, and the USA. There is a case of one business dean who heads two business schools (one in the UK and a small Danish business school). There are currently 16 deputy deans in UK business schools. Following the mergers of Henley with Reading and Ashridge with Hult, the model of the standalone executive education business school in the UK has declined, although London Business School is postgraduate. The title 'school of management' such as at Lancaster and Bradford is less used than 'business school' and 'department of management' is used in a few institutions, for example at King's College London and LSE. While the term 'Faculty of Business and Law' might be applied internally such as at Leeds Beckett and the Open University, for branding purposes the Business School is marketed externally as a separate identity.

'Business school' is used here as a generic term for a substantial entity that offers business and management education at degree level. Similarly, the term 'business school dean' refers to the senior leader of a business school. In the UK, the longest serving dean of a triple accredited business school at the time of writing is Sue Cox who is on her second deanship and third tenure and retires after 14 years in the position. According to AACSB International's 2014-15 survey, most deans, however, are novices with half in the UK in the job for less than three years (Bradshaw, 2015).



## Aims

This project explores the experiences of university-based business school deans across a range of different institutions. It aims to highlight key challenges and provide opportunities to enhance an understanding of behaviours with a view to improving policies and practices.

The following three questions were considered to support the research aims:

1. What are the motivations for becoming dean?
2. How do individuals experience the role?
3. What are the key challenges going forward?

## Theoretical frameworks

The focus of a Survey questionnaire and one-to-one interviews was on the university-based business school deanship, predominantly in full service business schools and multi-faculty universities. The role was framed as a middle management position responsible for an important strategic business unit within a large, complex multiunit institution. The interview questions were underpinned by Floyd and Wooldridge's (1992, 1994, 1996) model of strategic middle management roles related to synthesizing strategy, facilitating adaptability, championing, and implementing deliberate strategy to explore practices within

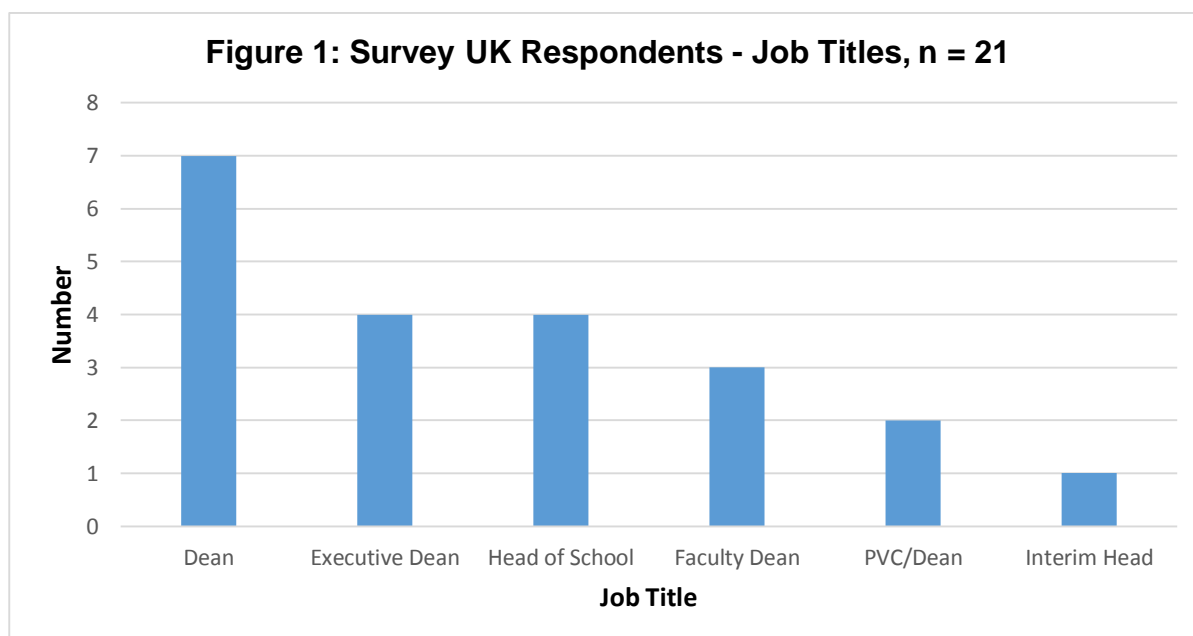
these four roles. Deans of university-based business schools may be conceptualised as hybrid leaders. Qingyan (2013), for example, used this approach to examine transnational university presidents who bridge multiple worlds. The hybrid middle manager crosses boundaries as a 'bridge, who both represents the professional agenda and embodies...a managerial one' (Ferlie et al, 1996: 194). Literature on 'pracademics' (e.g. Posner, 2009) also provides insights into individuals like deans who need to gain credibility in academic, policy, and practice arenas.

## Research methods

To answer our research questions on motivations, expectations, and challenges for university-based business school deans, we adopted a social constructivist approach and asked deans to comment on their lived experiences in different contexts. We drew on three sources of data: (i) AACSB International's triannual 2014-15 survey on what deans do (UK n=26, including three women, 12%); (ii) a Survey questionnaire emailed to UK deans who had not participated in the AACSB survey (n=21, including six women, 29%) and (iii) 35 qualitative interviews (including 11 women, 31%) were conducted on Skype/telephone or in person (usually for an hour) with a range of deans from a broad spectrum of business schools. In the UK, 18% of the total population of deans are female. Our interview sample comprised 24 deans from the UK (69%), plus two from Scotland, one in Wales, three each from Australia and the USA, and one each from China, France, Malaysia, New Zealand and Sweden (who had participated in the International Deans' Programme to lend insights into different models). Three deans were from Russell Group universities and nine (26%) were based in London business schools.

The interview questions asked about motivations, expectations, challenges, relationships with the centre, visibility, innovation, context, the changing role of the dean, personal scholarship and energy management, advice to aspiring deans, and future career plans. The interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed.

The 21 UK respondents for the Survey questionnaire comprised 64% who were externally appointed and two individuals in their second deanship who had previously been deans of non business school units. The range of current tenures was from three weeks to 13 years, with an arithmetic mean of three years and nine months and median of two years two months. A third were deans, while four each were executive deans or heads of school. The sample also included three faculty deans, two PVC dean roles, and an interim head as shown in Figure 1.



## Findings

The following sections highlight key responses to 10 key questions.

### 1. What are your motivations for becoming a dean?

The majority of interviewees said they had not planned to become dean and a few said that they only applied for the job after they had been approached by a head hunter. A couple of respondents were motivated by the prospect of moving home after many years away and contributing to the community where they had grown up. Commonly voiced motivations were to make a difference, to transform an institution, and build links with industry and SMEs. A former corporate executive without academic leadership experience who had lectured early in his career in an Ivy League business school admitted he liked 'talking with really bright and interesting people.' Another stated: 'I wanted to test out my idea that you could run a business school like a business.' Several warned that it is not a job you should do for money or status. You need to be sustained by an intrinsic interest in education. Another reason included that individuals had followed a logical path of academic leadership positions from head of group to head of department to associate dean, deputy, followed in some cases by acting dean. The deanship then became a clear career choice.

Many respondents stated that they had held leadership positions throughout their careers: 'I just can't help myself from getting involved. I enjoy institution building.' For example, one had headed a department of management in his early 30s and another who was dean at 38 was an expert in QAA regulations in his region. He was approached after a global search did not yield a suitable candidate. A few individuals who were towards the end of their careers candidly said they were bored with writing papers, even though they were well published, and that they wanted a change but definitely did not want a second deanship. Two deans in their 40s admitted that their application for dean had been a defensive move internally. For instance, one sought to protect a research culture that they did not want a new dean to disrupt. Another individual stood for the deanship because his colleagues had supported him on the basis of 'better the devil you know.' The issue of deans in acting roles who were not shortlisted for the substantive post was also raised, which had prompted them to relocate. One individual was paid 30% less as dean when the ever expanding job was benchmarked with a counterpart's. A move to a new deanship with adequate pay made her feel valued. The sample included 'pracademics' who felt they were able to bridge academia and practice and the dean's role played to this skillset.

There was quite a contrast between a long-term insider who was in the deanship for the long haul and another individual who knew that they were taking on a three-year trouble shooter role to turn the business school around, establish an infrastructure and then rapidly move on to another deanship or step up to a promotion. Five deans during the interviews indicated that they knew when they were leaving. A few individuals admitted that the deanship was a pre-retirement pension boost while others fully appreciated why some of their fellow professors on comfortable salaries with opportunities to supplement their incomes were not prepared to step up to a leadership role as there was no real financial incentive. Several interviewees expressed the mental shift in moving to the deanship from a narrow focus as an academic to broad stakeholder management with a responsibility to bring out the best in others. A few people believed that the head of department position is far more onerous than the dean's because heads have to deal with lots of detail and more direct line management problems. One lifetime academic remarked on his deanship:

‘it’s a helluva job, it’s all consuming. Absolutely nothing can prepare you for it but I wanted to leave a legacy at the end of my career.’

## 2. What are the expectations of your role?

It was clear from the replies that you need to be very thick skinned to be a dean and in an academic culture a command and control approach is not appropriate. An intensification of key performance indicators relating to reputation, revenue, rankings, research, accreditations, recruitment of international students and faculty dominates the lives of business school deans. All deans without AACSB accreditation were seeking this recognition except for two deans in London who were adamant it was unnecessary.

One dean who was about to retire commented on how unrealistic some applicants for his job were about their own skillsets:

‘it astonished me that several individuals with long lists of publications applied to be dean who had no line management or budget experience. Yet they felt qualified to run a large-scale, complex, multiple million pound business. Over the past decade, the deanship has grown enormously with a massively wide range of activities and much tighter control over resources. Being a top scholar is just not enough’

Aside from a basket of KPIs based on different metrics, deans were expected to:

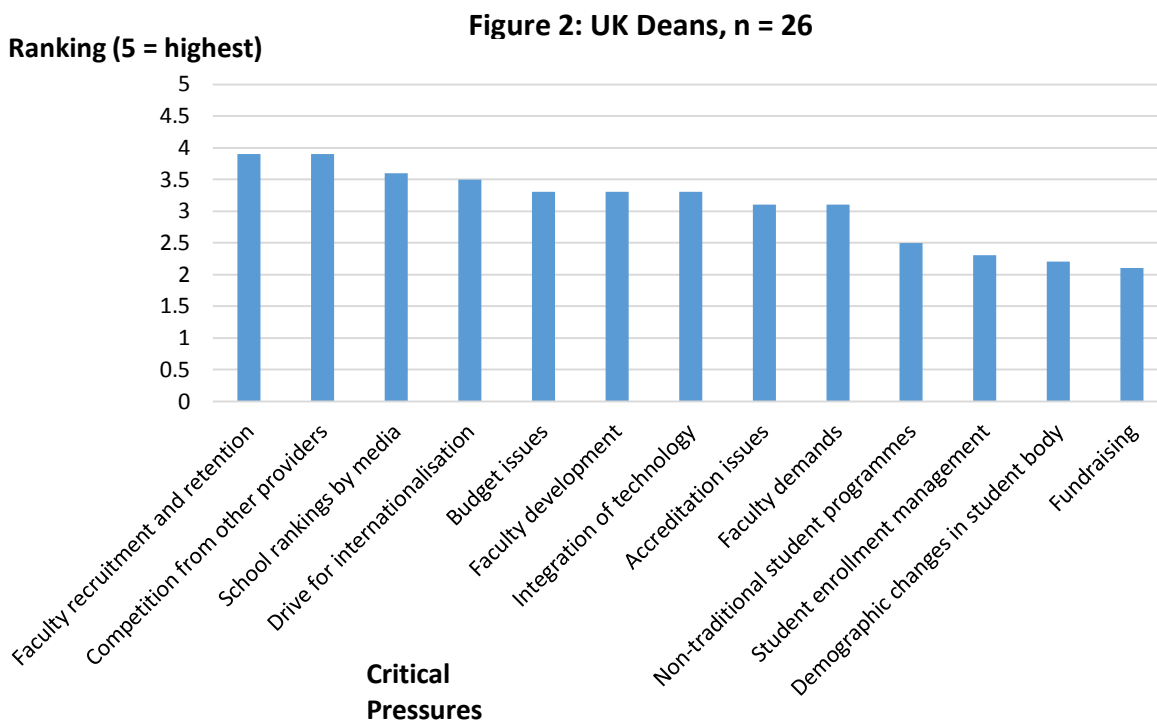
‘work at politics in managing upwards and sideways and to deal with tricky formal HR issues, get their head around estates and different business functions as well as manage semi-autonomous people who focus on their own reputations.’

## 3. What are the key challenges?

UK respondents to the Survey questionnaire prioritised the main challenges for them as:

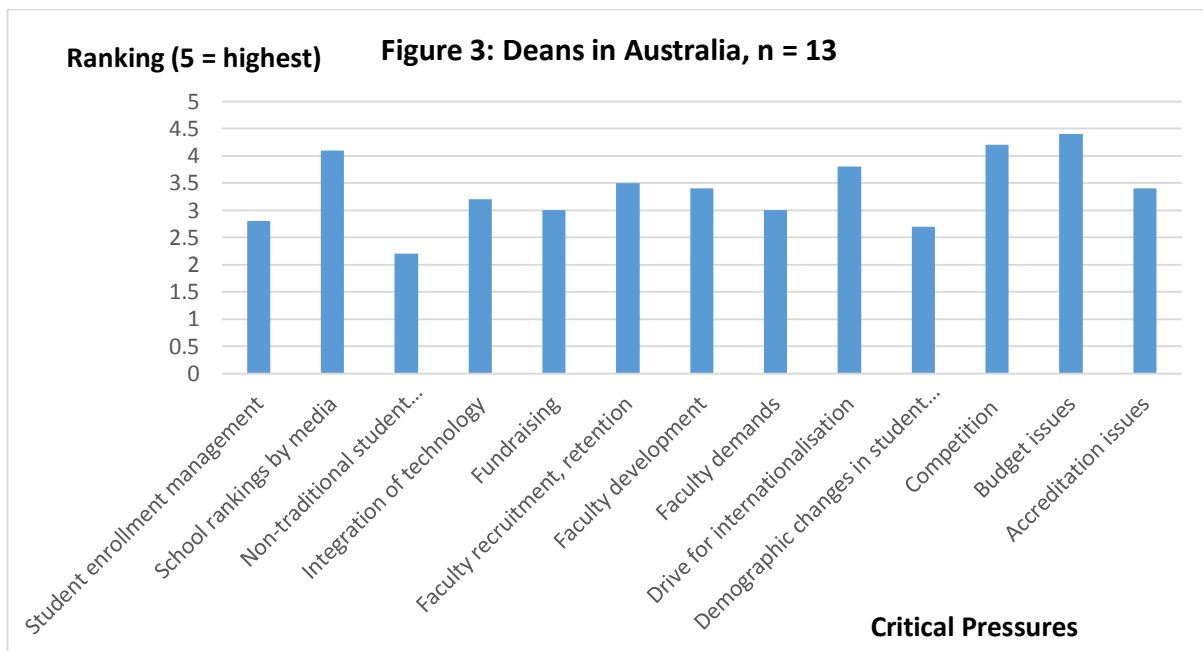
1. student recruitment
2. drive for internationalisation
3. faculty recruitment
4. rankings
5. faculty development
6. competition
7. budgets
8. rankings
9. integration of technology
10. accreditations
11. faculty demands
12. demographic changes
13. fund raising

This order of priorities differed from the responses to AACSB’s 2014-15 survey by UK deans where faculty recruitment and retention and competition were listed first, as shown in Figure 2.

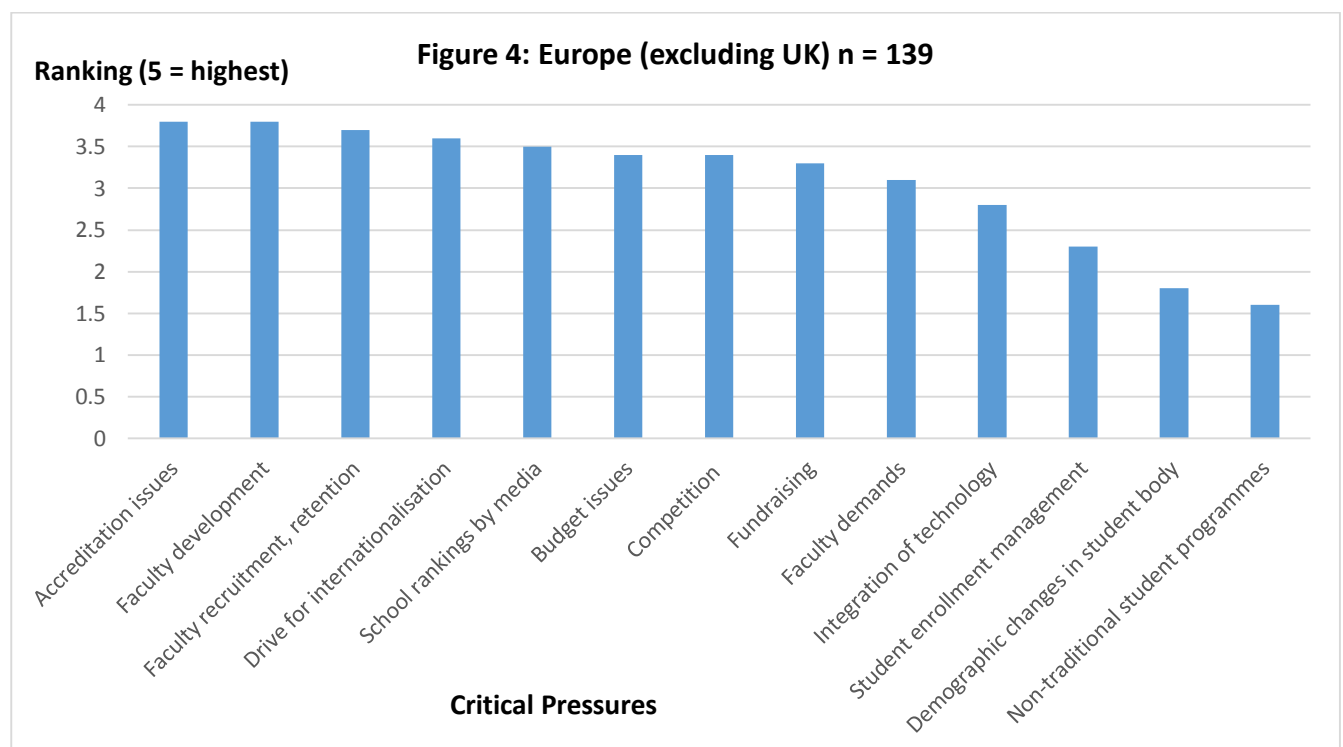


The timing of REF2014 may have impacted on the responses of the UK deans because of increased faculty mobility that tends to occur beforehand.

Figures 3-6 indicate replies to the AACSB questionnaire from Australia, Europe excluding the UK, the USA, and comparisons between the different regions.



Australian business schools teach a third of the entire higher education population, compared with a quarter in the USA. Deans in Australia, therefore, may be particularly squeezed by the rest of the university in terms of budgets, as indicated in Figure 3, especially as they say they are making a loss on each domestic student because of government regulations.



It appears from Figure 4 that budget issues figure less prominently in Europe possibly because of greater regulation on fees. Faculty development rather than recruitment seems to be more of a critical pressure, which again may be explained by greater government control.

In some countries, for example, faculty members are civil servants and salary differentials are less than in the UK where one dean commented:

‘you need to socialise the university into the fact that business school faculty are paid market salaries higher than engineers. It is not an easy conversation.’

**Figure 5: Critical Pressures Faced by Deans in the USA, n = 326** **Rankings (5 = highest)**

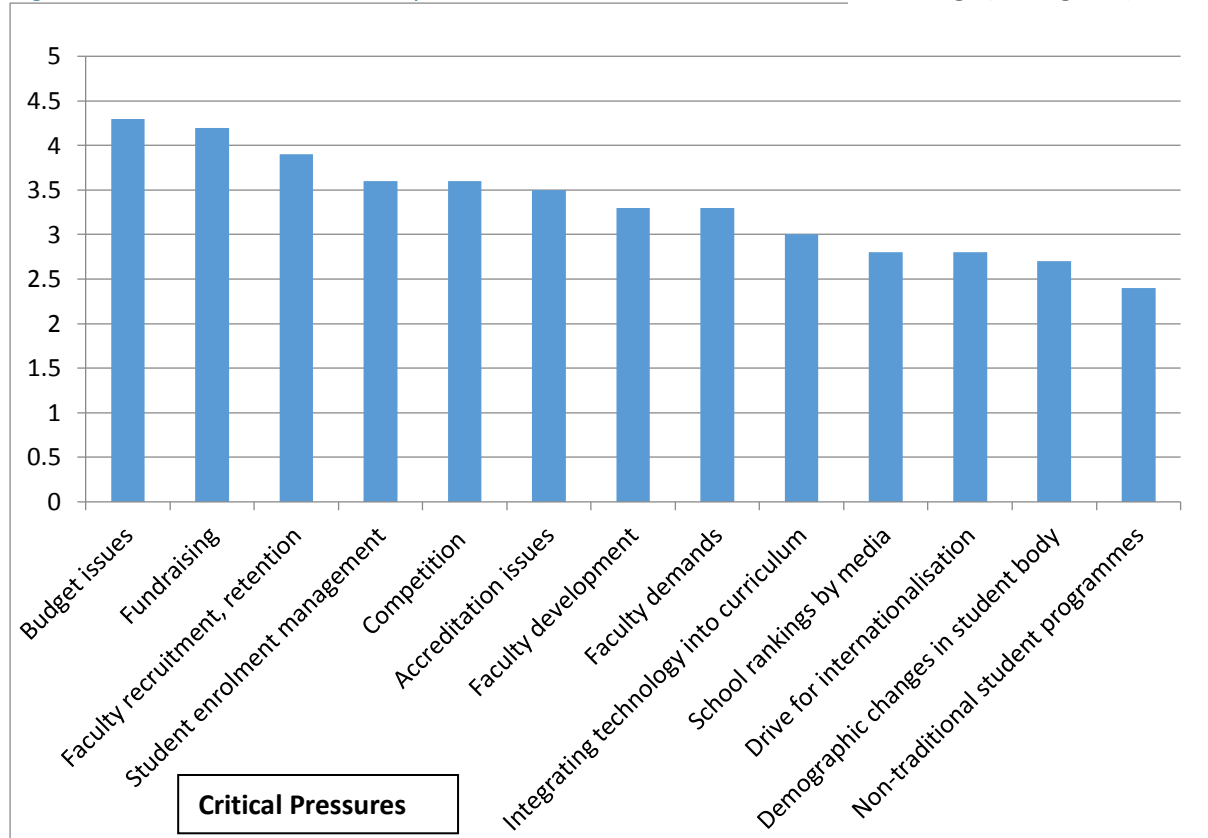
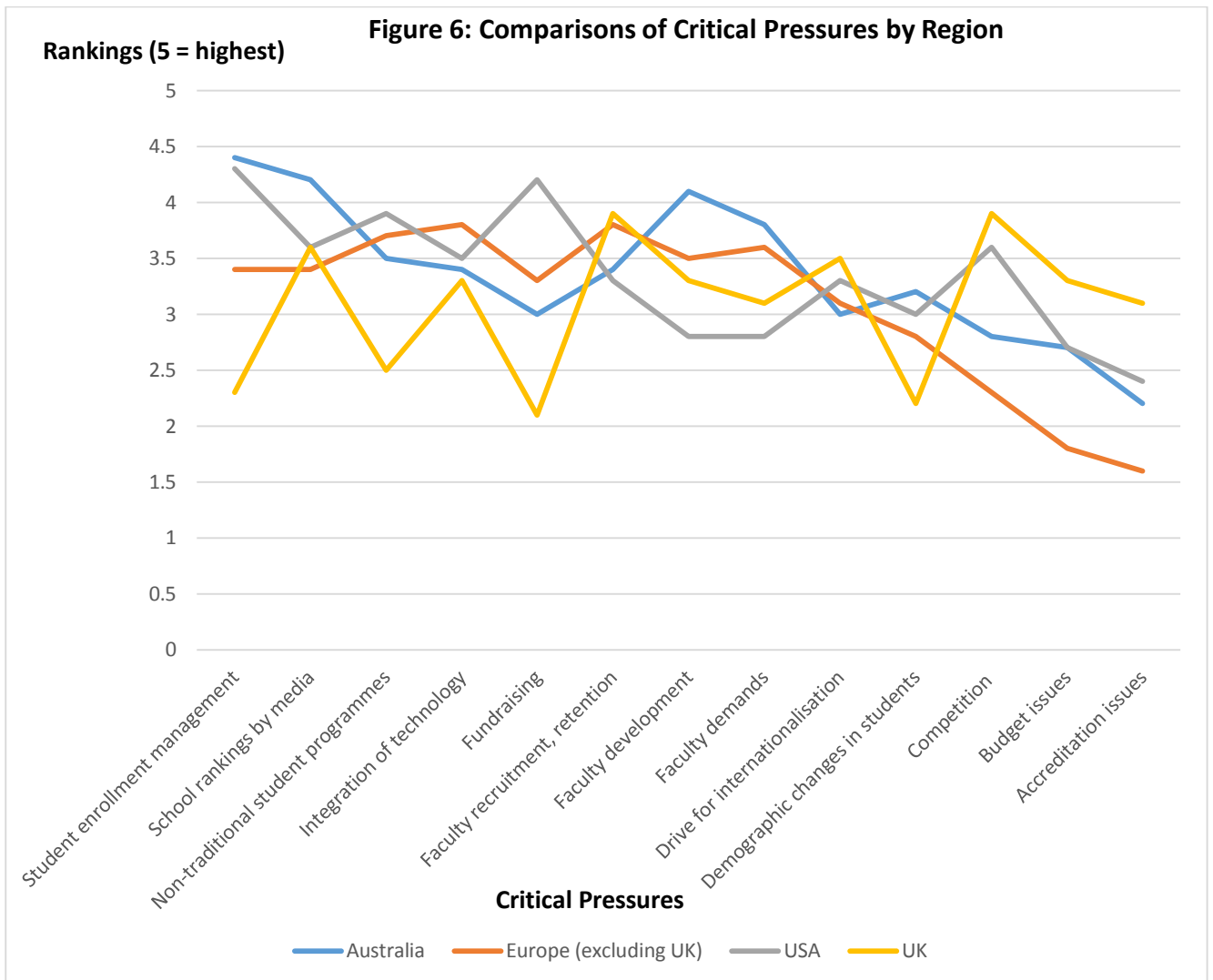


Figure 5 shows that in the USA, financial concerns figured as primary challenges for deans in relation to budgets and fundraising. Faculty recruitment was also important but internationalisation was viewed as less of a critical pressure.





The comparative data in Figure 6 show that budgetary concerns appear to be highest in Australia and the USA according to AACSB International’s survey. Fund raising is the second highest issue in the USA and lowest in the UK. While faculty recruitment is the highest priority in the UK, faculty development is more of a preoccupation in the rest of Europe than in the other countries.

When we asked UK deans about their challenges in dealing with the central university, several deans stated that there was no centre: ‘we are all one big happy family here.’ I’m a PVC as well so we all work for the University.’ In contrast, deans that reported to a faculty dean were more likely to feel disenfranchised. Particularly in research intensive universities, business school deans were quite vociferous about having to bail out STEM research and related estates projects. In one Australian business school, the dean contributes 70% of the school’s surplus to the university.

**4. What are the key behaviours needed in the business school deanship?**

Given the challenges listed above, it is interesting to investigate what behaviours are needed to address them. Key behaviours deans identified in the role included vision, leadership skills, emotional intelligence, negotiation, media and communications skills. Deans need to be tough and to

demonstrate resilience in an increasingly competitive environment as well as the ability to accept being unpopular. In our survey, deans indicated that they must also behave as ‘ambassadorial cheer leaders’, collaborating across all parts of the university while seeking opportunities for business education in many different subject curricula and research interests. One dean also believed that ‘it is helpful to know your staff care about people, and be authentic.’

Stakeholder management was recognised as a major part of the dean’s role with an increasing focus on industry engagement and public relations. Deans identified key behaviours such as strategic planning, vision and leadership, the ability to prioritise, and to work with other faculties. One mentioned the need to take risks and encourage radical innovation and academic freedom. Deans must also be purposeful and persuasive:

‘You need clarity of purpose about what has to be achieved and you must communicate why it is required.’

‘You need to have a clear idea of the direction of travel, and an ability to communicate this to others. You have to be able to bring people with you, and you need to be able to work well with colleagues across their disciplines within your own institution.’

‘Articulate the distinctiveness, value and relevance of your business school — in the number of education and research terms. A key challenge is the demographic downturn of 18 year olds so we need to be clear about our offering.’

The wide scope and responsibilities of the business school deanship were summed up by one respondent:

‘The greatest challenge is to be a leader and not just a manager. The dean must lead by example — as an outstanding and inspiring academic — and work to build a great academic community that supports and advances the careers of faculty. At the same time we must provide an excellent and memorable student experience that builds life-long ties with the school for its student body and alumni.’

Managing human resources and leadership capacity were seen as particularly problematic for some deans:

‘I have to deal with managing less than collegial behaviour from some prima donna research staff. There is also a frequent turnover of VCs and DVCs in the sector. We need to develop leadership capabilities.’

‘We have to put up with blockers and invidious conservatism.’

Overall, continuous communication, learning from experience, managing across and up, collaboration and sharing experiences were also seen as key behaviours in the role of business school dean.

One respondent enumerated the different foci in terms of financial acumen and a future, entrepreneurial orientation required in the current climate:

- (1) forecasting and budgeting in a rapidly changing policy environment
- (2) ensuring innovation is a central part of 'business as usual'
- (3) managing the evolving role of a business school in a university.

The transition to dean can be a shock: 'I moved from an ancient to a new university and our factory franchise operations overseas were an anathema.' Another overseas dean said: 'I was OK with moving countries as I had done this before but the transition in my first deanship to such a broad generalist role took a long time getting used to. You have to disengage, you can't just represent your discipline any more or be friends with everyone. A lot of time is spent managing up and with external stakeholders.' Peter Moizer at Leeds University Business School (Bradshaw, 2015) reiterated the steep learning curve in getting to grips with the behaviours required: 'It took me about three years to get on top of [the job]. Whereas in the corporate world the chief executive's job is an extension of what has gone before — the finance director or a division head often gets the top job — in a business school the job of the dean is completely different from that of a star professor.' It seems that individuals who are best suited to the deanship need to appreciate the reality of the broad stakeholder management requirements of the post.

An acting dean reflected on useful preparation for the role and a range of behaviours needed in the position:

'Actually working with/inside business organisations BEFORE becoming a dean is helpful. Working for the competition before working for your chosen organisation, walking on the greener grass first to understand that it is not as green as you might think on the other side helps you to be less cynical.'

Speak with a finance/accounting voice: know the figures and know where your money comes from (understand the balance sheet, income statement and cash flows of your university/school). You also need reflective and creative thinking.'

One individual who had been dean for two decades advised:

'You need to develop different tactics to work alongside and influence your VC. There's a lot of naïveté around university politics. You must want to do the job so you have to make sure you get your adrenalin going. You must always look the part on public platforms. Never behave like a victim. Positivity breeds positivity. Use humour to defuse tension and avoid getting uptight. The reality is that business schools are often the jewel in the crown and we need to celebrate how we can help the wider university and gain the moral high ground. In doing so, we will gain support. There are different routes to the loot and you have to figure out with some emotional intelligence how to maximise the school's clout and adjust to changing VCs. Don't bang the table to gain recognition. Also take time to influence university colleagues other than your line manager. It is also very important for you to get experience of being on boards and managing large budgets.'

One dean indicated the distinction he made in terms of his own strategizing behaviours:

'You must demonstrate real strategic thinking as opposed to reacting strategically to operational challenges.'

At a personal level for deans in post, it was seen as important to retain confidence and wellbeing and not to 'wobble.' Several deans were living away from home during the week and this arrangement also allowed for some boundary setting. Two individuals said they had learned over time — one following a heart attack — not to discuss work with their partners at home so that they could switch off. Personal resilience and emotional intelligence are important:

‘Keep yourself buoyant but at the same time keep yourself grounded. Don’t get ground down. You must look after yourself mentally and physically and compartmentalise recovery time. Get a deputy or a great team around you. Work hard but don’t take it too seriously, enjoy it.’

## 5. How do you engage with your advisory board?

The rise in the number of UK business schools applying for AACSB accreditations appeared to have resulted in more deans setting up advisory boards. US deans have influential boards that supported the curriculum and provided useful advice. For example, board members had supplied mentors for students and supported networking events. One US dean noted a trend for university presidents to be political appointments, for instance a former state governor who appointed individuals with a similar background to his advisory board. Several deans highly praised their boards and found them a source of excellent guidance. While one dean banned members of the business school advisory board from any direct contact with the rest of the university, in another instance the VC attended the advisory board because it was felt that the small business school needed to be embedded within the university. This was in stark contrast to the situation where the dean was highly resistant to a ‘one university’ approach that had been imposed which resulted in the law school dean being responsible for the business school as well. In three other cases, the advisory board had been abandoned because members had become too ‘hands on.’ In these cases, the deans were in the process of reconstituting advisory boards from alumni and individuals who were less likely to interfere with internal matters.

One of the interviewees cautioned:

‘avoid just going for the big names and top CEOs who never have time to show up. Go for levels lower down with your advisory board and choose members from all sectors such as big business, local council, SMEs, social enterprises that are genuinely interested in working with you.’

If the advisory board is well constituted and managed, it can provide a rich source of ideas and personal support for the business school dean.

One individual advised:

‘the trick with advisory boards is to deal with them one-on-one and to find out what they want and how you fit with that. One person was particularly interested in lean management and I hired someone who provided that expertise and so the school interacted with the company at several different touch points.’

Deans find it very insightful to be members on advisory boards of other business schools.

## 6. How do you maintain visibility and use social media?

Most deans admitted it was important to be visible in the business school and in the university, to be politically astute, and to raise the business school’s profile amongst the business community. The majority of deans interviewed avoided twitter: ‘I find it nauseating’, ‘It’s a distraction from research time.’ Several stated they were not interested in self-promotion and that any tweeting was only to convey a clear message about the school. One of the deans was vehemently against twitter:

'I think tweeting is very dangerous – if you make a mistake you can be nailed to the wall. In the financial industry, people do not tend to tweet or blog. The real issue is what is the key message you want to give to everyone? As dean, you're on stage 24 hours a day. Here if you have an idea, you can talk to anyone and decide what's worthwhile. I've done lots of podcasts and TV interviews.'

The US deans said they accepted students on Facebook to keep in touch with alumni. They were more likely than their UK counterparts to be intermittent tweeters. A UK dean with regular media output explained that he told the university PR experts that he would be visible and available whenever they needed him. He found that talking on BBC World Service gave him considerable outreach and alumni would contact him afterwards, however, surprisingly he avoided twitter. A couple of deans mentioned that they circulated a regular internal email update to colleagues instead. In contrast, one dean from the USA described himself as the school's main cheerleader and felt he should tweet more often. There were issues about whether the business school brand was stronger than the university's in different institutions. One of the interviewees had deliberately worked on her profile with the *Financial Times*, participating in events with journalists and gaining visibility on AACSB and EFMD committees: 'without a doubt, I worked on my brand as dean.' One veteran said it was important to understand outsiders' perspectives on business schools and to gain visibility that is meaningful from the viewpoint of external stakeholders. Only one of the deans interviewed had his own Wikipedia page and his tweets were a series of observations on student celebrations, sporting events, and US politicians' speeches.

## 7. How do you manage your energy levels and personal scholarship?

In relation to managing their energy levels, a few individuals indicated that the job energised them because they found it intrinsically interesting and they enjoyed solving 'knotty problems.'

'It's been fantastic to manage change and to create an environment where my colleagues can feel they make a contribution. People are stretched and running harder but it is a real pleasure to have a close working team and to create ways to fix things. Satisfaction comes from making progress and making a difference. For instance, we run a cross university self-awareness programme and the students give back and see how they impact on the world. This is hugely successful.'

Responses about personal research productivity ranged from individuals who fiercely protected their time for personal scholarship: 'your publications are a platinum card for moving on.' 'You lose your credibility entirely if you do not publish.' A few others stated they had tried to keep up scholarship by requesting research leave and keeping in touch with doctoral students. Several deans freely admitted that it was impossible: 'My research is in dry dock.' 'I have absolutely no time for anything, the job is 100% consuming.' Another said, 'I don't do any research now but leading a business school is an intellectually challenging case study in itself. It's a live research project.'

## 8. What are your future career plans?

One respondent in the USA who was about to embark on his fourth deanship admitted, 'I'm an academic gypsy.' After an itinerant career he had finally decided he would spend the last decade of his career as a dean to support an underperforming school rather than embark on another rapid 'get

in, turnaround, and exit' scenario. In contrast, another individual towards the end of his career confessed, 'I just don't have the stamina to do it again. It's been overwhelming.' The appointment of a new VC was a trigger point for some deans to change institutions, especially if their fundamental values differed, for instance when a VC's rhetoric was about raising quality at the same time as he allowed entry tariffs to drop.

Responses to questions about future plans were influenced by the nature of the deans asked. The sample of interviewees was based on individuals who were well known in the Chartered Association of Business Schools compared with the Survey respondents who were self-selected following a general email. In the interviews, a third (12) of the deans said their next career move would be retirement, 23% (8) would consider another deanship, 17% (6) were contemplating promotion, and another 17% intended to return to the professoriate. Two said they did not have any plans and one was keen to continue to be involved in entrepreneurial activities. Specifically one mentioned the option of a deanship in Europe while another thought about leading a larger social sciences unit. No one admitted that they wanted to be a VC although a few had been interviewed for posts as head of a university. They generally felt that the deanship was more interesting and rewarding than being responsible solely for research or teaching across the university without any budget: 'I enjoy the adrenalin of taking responsibility for profit and loss.'

Most interviewees had a game plan for exit and did not see the deanship extending indefinitely. Many said five to six years were enough in the role. They were open about possible options. It was surprising that a few of the deans were intending only to be in the role for three years and then retire or move on.

## 9. What changes do you see in the roles of deans?

It was suggested that the role of deans in mature business schools is becoming more of an executive position. This is illustrated by the requirements for external facing responsibilities and increasing interdependencies within the university. An individual on his second deanship commented, 'deans are developing as a separate cadre that require socialisation and professionalisation through programmes like the IDP and 3DP.'

One dean commented on the pace and scale of change, arguing 'the job has definitely got tougher. There's no time to think. The golden age has gone and we are constantly being asked to grow numbers and revenues. We are always recruiting new staff who now must have PhD qualifications. There's an army of adjuncts. The KPIs are very instrumental and you've always got to be looking at the numbers.'

There was a real concern expressed by one dean about conceits within the business school community and whether we really are addressing critical issues in society and adding value:

'What serious work is being done in UK business schools on the Greek financial crisis or social inequality or how the UK can be more productive? We're leaving it to economists still like Thomas Piketty. If you were in government, would you give research funds to gene therapy for motor neurone disease or to business schools to reflect on humour amongst hospital surgeons? We need to get real and find how we can support other disciplines.'

On a positive note, one veteran dean highlighted the significant opportunities in ASEAN countries and emerging economies for new business development. There was also a view that the career opportunities for business school deans are expanding with transnational education.

## 10. What is your advice for aspiring deans?

Advice to prospective deans included micro, meso, and macro level perspectives.

The need to retain an internal locus of control and a clear headed approach was mentioned: 'Keep calm and rational.' One dean found this worked effectively inside the school but was more problematic when faced with contradictory demands from 'managing upstairs.'

The criticality of maintaining personal scholarship was emphasized by several respondents: 'Stay research active to retain your credibility with peers for continued career success. You need external and internal market value. Don't neglect either of these.' Networking was also regarded as an important element: 'Ensure that you have good external networks, both within academia and business.' This was repeated by others: 'Get as wide experience as possible of the range of challenges and ensure that you build external networks while sustaining personal research.' The generalist nature of the deanship was noted: 'it's great for an all-rounder....especially if you don't want to be a DVC or VC!'

Some respondents viewed the deanship as a point of no return: 'Be absolutely sure that this is the career that you want — there's no going back.'

Another dean stressed the importance of becoming dean for the right reasons: 'If you love what you're doing, then go for it, but don't apply for the status or the pay packet. It's a challenging role, but if you love higher education then you get through the tough times.'

The importance of strategic choices and priorities was also highlighted in bounding the parameters of the deanship and achievements:

'Concentrate on securing and growing the school's core income and ensure that the focus remains on KPIs that drive league table rankings. This helps secure outstanding staff, students and business links, and all the other benefits that flow from being in a virtuous circle.'

'Have a clear simple plausible strategy with a limited range of achievable objectives. Work out quickly what you can't afford time to get involved in.'

'Have clear strategies and plans to achieve the improvements/targets/KPIs needed. Financial viability is important — without it everything else is very difficult to do.'

Robust relations with the central university are vital:

'Without the support of the VC and top management team, the job is impossible. Be prepared for many "discussions" with the host institution (even when there is notional agreement on the business school's place). Make sure that you understand and believe in the trajectory the VC is taking the university.'

In terms of getting things done, one of the deans advised: 'Be prepared to lead, not manage by committee.' It was also seen as important to experiment:

'There's nothing you can't fix. There's nothing you can't undo. Create a piece of machinery to get a job done, be willing to consult with academic and professional services colleagues. And if something doesn't work, you can change it. Keep people in the loop, be ambitious, and have fun.'

Positioning was regarded as an imperative within the business school industry: 'Find a differentiator in a crowded marketplace.'

One dean responded negatively:

'Don't be a dean! Your VC will see you as a cash cow: you will be subject to intense pressure to recruit overseas students of variable quality and pass them. Remember that there is a strong anti-business lobby in most universities. Do not trust university administrators. Remember you have no power to remove disruptive staff. Don't plan to stay indefinitely — see it as a three or five year job and plan succession.'

Another was more balanced: 'Be aware that you have little control of your diary. It is very hard work, but very satisfying!' An interim dean elaborated on the complex and multifaceted nature of the role:

'Make sure you really do want to become a dean! Speak to existing deans. Speak to past deans. Go on a leadership development course beforehand. Seek clarity on autonomy, budgetary powers and recruitment controls. Get ready to push colleagues from behind as well as leading from the front. Get ready to become an HR manager (unpaid). Be prepared to be thick-skinned, realising that it might be a lonely job. Get prepared to chair committees and boards and panels. Be commercially aware and business-friendly. Invest time in your own development. ENJOY IT ALL!'

Moreover, he noted the responsibility of deans to nurture and enable colleagues: 'Don't forget that you are an advocate for your colleagues across teaching and research and administration: you support THEM, not the other way round.' This was echoed in another respondent's comment:

'leadership is about creating an environment for others' success. Be really clear on what success looks like for your students, staff, alumni, business partners, school and university and keep this at the heart of everything you do.'

Additional advice included comments such as the decision to become dean: 'be sure this is what you want, there is no turning back. It's a risky choice, especially in your 40s.'

When applying for a particular deanship, several individuals mentioned the importance of choosing to work in an institution that resonates with your values. One dean had formulated a strategy to create a 'public value business school' linked to the world's first university social science park that resonated strongly with his research interests. Another dean said that she had worked with mentors who helped shape her CV to fit the rules of the game that are critical to success.

In terms of strategic positioning, the advice given was: 'find a niche for your school.' Given the challenge of recruiting and retaining faculty, aspiring deans need to consider how they balance talent management with the realities of the world for the generation of students who are 'second curvers.' This is a term used by Handy (2015) for individuals who must constantly reinvent themselves and start



a second curve of personal transformation just when everything is going right in their current role as technology disrupts business models.

One dean related this to faculty: 'We need to retool faculty to think in different ways about how the business school's portfolio will be shared, for example in applying organisational development to the performing arts and health care. In the USA, portfolio degrees are available and they represent an interesting model to prepare graduates for portfolio careers.'

## Conclusion

It may be argued that the dean's role has diminished with greater centralisation and consolidation of academic units. As a counterpoint to this, the role of PVC/executive dean which reports directly to the VC enhances the business school where it is a faculty in its own right. This means, however, that the leap from being an associate dean to PVC/executive dean is greater. There is also considerable variation in types of dean in terms of the size of the business school where some appear to be a 'university within a university' while others are like small departments. Deans in the UK seem to be a mix of either traditional academics who have moved inexorably from one leadership position to another in the sector, or former corporate executives who earned doctorates from leading US business schools. The business school deanship has become more transnational in terms of the labour market. Deans themselves appear to be cross breeds and reticulists who 'engage in networking tasks and employ methods of co-ordination and task integration across organizational boundaries' (Alter and Hage, 1993: 46).

Most individuals in this study said that their move into the deanship was unintentional and serendipitous but a natural progression. There was common agreement that there are many capable people in business schools who are unwilling to step up to leadership positions. Deans typically said that the decision to become dean is a tough and unrelenting lifestyle choice that demands excellent health, emotional intelligence, and considerable resilience. Even if their positions were permanent, many respondents considered it a high stakes and demanding role and were aware that they needed an exit plan.

There was a general feeling that business schools are not always sufficiently understood

or valued by host universities but most are able to generate far more revenue than other academic enterprises. Views were expressed that there is scope for universities to leverage the value of business schools beyond revenue generation for STEM, to cross subsidise the research of other departments, and to engage in cross-disciplinary work for mutual gain. Without exception, all interviewees felt increasingly squeezed by their university to grow and generate revenues to support less financially successful units and to enhance rankings and reputations. Several deans wished for clarity over what would represent a steady state rather than a relentless growth agenda.

Centralisation of professional services was a common challenge although in some cases these services are physically located in the business school and while formal reporting lines are to the centre, the allegiances of the individuals such as in marketing and communications may in practice be to the business school. Universally there was concern about recruiting and retaining faculty (especially in accounting and finance) and having to draw on practitioners (a gap that AACSB's Bridge Programme seeks to address). From a positive perspective, multi-disciplinarity was seen as driving behaviours that support greater inclusivity, as Ferlie et al (2014) advocate for research projects to lend the business school greater credibility. This means the dean plays an important diplomatic role in building bridges with other parts of the university in research and teaching to collaborate and gain insights from different disciplines and to demonstrate the value proposition of the business school. The creation of superfaculties and executive deans with restructuring, simplification and consolidation of units that ostensibly have little in common was also seen as a trend.

Predictions about the future indicate greater requirements for the dean to raise more external funding which means they need to be more networked and visibly adding value. There is potential to learn from US business school deans about how to leverage the contributions of business school advisory boards without the necessary requirement in Ivy League institutions for the members to be major donors. Collaborative, cross faculty, and cross sector approaches with increasing

complexity will continue to be expected of university-based business school deans who cross multiple worlds and discourses. We agree with Kring and Kaplan (2011: 1) that next generation deans will need to demonstrate greater 'strategic skills, enterprise management, innovation, and people and relationship effectiveness.

## Recommendations

The aim of this research was to highlight the motivations, experiences, and challenges of university-based business school deans. We identified five recommendations from the findings:

### **(1) Communicate a greater understanding of how deans and business schools can contribute to the wider university.**

The evidence suggests that across the sector the role of business school dean is defined differently depending on the context but general KPIs are very similar. There is a trend in the UK towards larger faculties/colleges. This is resulting in enlarged positions of PVC/executive dean that report directly to the VC. If the dean is not a business school expert and the business school is relatively larger than the other schools in the faculty/college, the value of the business school may not be fully realised. Business schools are exceptionally well placed to offer international and premium programmes and higher faculty salaries. They are less able, however, to attract large research council grants so they need to collaborate to develop synergies with large science and other schools that do successfully gain research income. A structural trend in the UK towards centralised services may result in the business school dean being responsible for targets without having direct control of operations. Given the size of business schools and the popularity of business and management education, there needs to be a greater appreciation of the complexity of the business school sector in terms of postgraduate and international students and a globally mobile academic labour market which means faculty recruitment and retention are major preoccupations for UK business school deans. The specific challenges of the business school dean, therefore, need to be more clearly articulated and appreciated. There need to be more realistic expectations about

how best to allow the dean to leverage change and position the business school brand in a highly competitive market with business school sector specific rankings, revenues, research income, corporate relations, accreditations and a broader set of stakeholder engagements that differ from other academic entities. The market for business school deans is becoming more transnational and the turnover is accelerating so it is important that VCs understand the role. A standardised, centralist approach to managing a business school within a supersized faculty may undermine the business school's ability to fulfil its potential.

### **(2) Promote peer-to-peer support mechanisms.**

Deans found sector specific and external mentoring and networking activities important for socialisation and career transitions in moving into such a broad generalist role. There is scope to formalise this, to establish action learning sets around specific problems, develop negotiating skills, political acumen, boundary spanning, external relations, etc. Formal mechanisms could be established for veteran deans to act as a sounding board and sources of socialisation and expertise as well as career planning and interview advice for individuals who are in deputy and acting roles. Aspiring deans need to be encouraged to gain experience in operating confidently on boards and with budgets. The Chartered ABS & EFMD International Deans' Programme aims to make a contribution here.

### **(3) Provide more evidence based leadership development for deans as visible boundary spanners, intermediaries, and ambassadors.**

It will be useful for specific data of changes in the types and demands of deans, turnover, demographics, job opportunities, salaries, etc. to be collected to support capacity building in

the business school sector. More benchmarking data can help deans make the case internally for what is particular about business schools and for investment in recognition of their multiple contributions. Leadership development interventions for deans' changing roles need to be evaluated against new realities for public visibility in hybrid roles as interfacers and integrators.

#### **(4) Enhance career management.**

The findings in our report suggest that business school deans can be frustrated by the loss of time for personal scholarly outputs which may adversely affect their future career prospects. It is important that deans are encouraged to request, as part of their package, research leave, research assistants and doctoral supervision or the creation of roles that are not found amongst their counterparts in the rest of the university such as a deputy dean or COO. It is important to support acting deans and to recognise the variety of typologies such as turnaround deans and those who are seeking a career of serial, possibly transnational, deanships.

#### **(5) Deliberately plan opportunities for the business school leadership pipeline.**

Given the typically frequent turnover of business school deans and the small pool of applicants, university HR directors need to know about the market for business school deans and develop a more realistic appreciation of how appointing a dean of the business school may differ from hiring a dean for another professional school or academic unit. Succession planning matters and we need to nurture emerging business school deans and academic leadership at all levels. Business school deans themselves can promote the positive aspects of the role and encourage meaningful delegation to colleagues who demonstrate an interest in becoming academic leaders.

#### **Future research projects**

Further research might explore deans' teams, dyadic relationships amongst VCs, deans, registrars, business school COOs and chairs of advisory boards. There is scope to compare deans' roles across professional schools within the same or between institutions or across countries. Ethnographic studies of how deans emerge, learn on the job, and develop over transitions might also be worth investigating. . It would be useful to collect vignettes of deans' journeys. Mentoring between deans with corporate backgrounds and those who have risen via the academic route might benefit each considerably. Additionally, the concern in the UK with recruiting faculty could be further explored. Typologies of deans might be investigated based on the type of institution or type of experiences. Categories might include: serial transnational deans, those who move between business schools with quite different missions such as from the Russell Group to a more industrial model, business executives as deans, long serving deans, or those who have exited suddenly and gone on to a second deanship, 'super' deans of mega faculties, or deans who have subsequently become PVCs, DVCs or VCs. On a more practical level, rankings of business schools' financial contributions to their host university would be useful if meaningful benchmarks could be established. Within the current discourse of impact (Lejeune et al, 2015), we might explore how to build a dean's individual impact or brand strength. There are also issues related to gender and intersections of diversity, acting deans (e.g. Allan, 2014), and post deanship experiences, and how deans are engaging personally with innovation challenges (Thorpe and Rawlinson, 2014). Deans need to engage with global opportunities, particularly in Asia, and to work with the demand for business and management education in developing economies.

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