by Roy Suddaby

Managerial Pathologies: Barriers to Academic Culture, Collegiality and Leadership

The growth of administration in universities is well-documented. Yale University, for example, employs 5,460 administrators for fewer than five thousand students (Dinino, 2024). Many US private colleges report spending almost twice as much on administration as on academics (ACTA, 2017). Other surveys show that the ratio of administrators to faculty in these colleges increased from one for every 3.5 faculty members in 1990 to 2.2 in 2012 (ACTA, 2017). The UK experience is similar. Data shows approximately 60% growth in managers and non-academic professionals from 2005/6 to 2017/18 across 117 generalist universities (Bolton, 2020), with growth concentrated in marketing and the 'student experience'. In Canada, institutional reports from the University of British Columbia (UBC) show periods where staff growth significantly outpaced faculty growth and faculty/student growth (UBC Planning and Institutional Research, 2019). Collectively, these studies support a growing argument that as universities have grown, administrative professionals have grown more rapidly than both students and faculty.

Critics observe that the growth in administrative professionals is the causal source of the erosion of collegial governance in universities. In *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the Administrative University and Why it Matters*, Benjamin Ginsberg (2011) describes a gradual but inevitable erosion in faculty voice and power in universities as decision-making shifts from faculty committees to centralised governance structures like the Senate and, perhaps more insidiously, to administrative professionals.

In some cases, the shift in governance structures is overt and justified by the growth in size of the university. However, other shifts in power are often more subtle. Hiring and promotion of faculty, for example, remains exclusively with the faculty, but is often overseen by human resources or legal professionals whose organisational rules often subordinate collegial decision-making to a managerial or bureaucratic logic. Ginsberg goes on to point out that faculties rarely have but a ceremonial voice in business or investment decisions, changes to the physical structure of the university, or fund-raising and alumni issues. Ginsberg (2011: 4) notes that, increasingly, student issues, such as the size of the student body, tuition, financial aid, and admissions policies, are controlled by administrators. Ultimately, traditional modes of collegial governance fall victim to centralised bureaucratic structures dominated by an administrative logic and bureaucratic rules.

As the authority of administration grows, much of the deliberative decision-making of collegial governance devolves to the formal structure of bureaucratic decision-making. Drawing on several decades of archival data from Stanford University's administrative records, March, Schulz and Zhou (2000) show how written organisational codes—rules, procedures, and policies—emerge, proliferate, and decay. They show how rules respond to crises, changes in leadership, bureaucratic expansion, and shifts in organisational priorities. Their findings reveal that rules are not inert but adaptively proliferate. Rules beget more rules that evolve through feedback loops of compliance, exception handling, and organisational learning. The administrative rules at Stanford tended to accumulate through reactive problem-solving, generating what the authors call a 'rule ecology' in which new regulations coexist, compete, and sometimes cannibalise older ones. More critically, March et al. (2000) show that new rules tend to solve problems in the past rather than prevent problems in the future.

Business schools play a unique role in this process. Unlike other disciplines drawn reluctantly into the market and its managerial logic, business schools were founded within it and actively encourage the professionalisation of management. Many of the managerial professionals exported to other units on campus hold undergraduate or graduate degrees from the business school. Because business schools are highly dependent on very high tuition fees, large endowments, and corporate partnerships, business schools have not only internalised the logic of administration earlier and more deeply than other faculties, but they have also become the institutional carrier of managerial logics to those other faculties.

Collectively, this research demonstrates how the growth of universities in size and complexity has encouraged administrative bloat, which, in turn, has encouraged the erosion of collegial university governance and replaced it with a new form of managerial governance. To better understand the implications of this for university governance, we turn to a brief history of collegial governance.

Collegial vs Managerial Professionalism

Collegiality – from the Latin ***collegium*** – refers to governance by peers united in a common vocation. Historically, universities operated as self-regulating communities of scholars where authority was exercised through deliberation, trust, and mutual recognition of expertise (Sahlin and Eriksson-Utterquist, 2016; Gustaaffson, 2011). Legitimacy in decision-making was derived from collective judgment, rather than hierarchical authority. This is a form of governance typified in professional partnerships which embodies a 'third logic' (Freidson, 2001) distinct from the managerial logic of a bureaucracy or the more expedient logic of a market-based organisation; one in which the quality of decision-making is paramount and is achieved through internalised norms and peer evaluation. Collegiality, thus, represents both a governance mechanism and a moral ideal that institutionalises trust, integrity and shared responsibility.

Collegiality works best in small communities where scholars know one another personally and can rely on shared norms of reciprocity and reputation. As universities expanded, these mechanisms were harder to sustain. In their historical study of Stanford University, March et al. (2000) observed that as the institution grew, its written rules multiplied, and authority drifted upward. The informal standards of collegiality that once guided academic life were replaced by formal administrative codes. Growth and complexity privilege speed and dispassionate efficiency in decision-making, neither of which is supported by collegiality.

Size creates coordination problems that invite bureaucratic solutions. Others observe the same pattern. Clark (1983) described how the 'triangle of coordination' in higher education tilts from collegial to managerial control as systems scale. Musselin (2009) traced how decision-making authority migrates from faculty units to central senates and executive offices. Deem (1998) identified this shift as the emergence of 'new managerialism' in the university. In each account, scale erodes the moral and interpersonal foundations of collegiality, replacing them with procedural forms of purely rational control.

Managed Professionalism Creates Managed Collegiality

A growing chorus of academic and popular press writers joins Ginsberg's (2011) fear of the danger administrative bloat holds for collegiality in our universities (Clinton, 2014; Dinno, 2024; Thompson, 2024; Weinstein, 2023). Not only is authentic collegial governance diminishing, it has increasingly been appropriated by administrators as an extension of managerial professionalism and now functions as a tool for managers rather than as an authentic, deliberative form of governance. Increasingly, committees of academics are tasked with aligning their decisions and programmes to strategic plans designed by administrators rather than faculty. Peer review of academic performance, originally intended as a form of shaping the intellectual foundation of the university, has become a tool of performance monitoring where, for example, performance is measured by counting publications in ranked journals.

Collegial language persists in this regime – faculty are 'consulted' and 'engaged' – but, as Thompson (2024:1) notes, bureaucratic bloat has siphoned true power away from instructors and researchers. The result is a form of managed collegiality in which academics participate in collegial governance, but only performatively so, without autonomy or agency. They provide background and dialogue but without the power to make decisions. Governance remains, but its purpose is to demonstrate legitimacy, not leadership.

What is missing in managed collegiality is the moral purpose of research and education in academia that once informed collegiality as a social institution. A cornerstone of institutional theory is that institutions fail to endure unless they fully integrate technical and moral objectives. To institutionalise, American sociologist Philip Selznick (1949: xx) observed in his influential book ***Leadership in Administration***, is to infuse an organisation "with meaning beyond the technical value of the task at hand."

Selznick was following the logic of German sociologist Max Weber, who recognised the powerful efficiency of bureaucracy but lamented the loss of meaning and value that came with it. In his 1919 lecture, Weber (2015) noted that the word Beruf (vocation) gave everyday labour a religious significance. While the assembly line and the modern factory may be remarkably efficient, Marx observed, they tend to dehumanise workers in a way that traditional vocational work did not. Later, Weber (2015) would describe bureaucracy as a mixed blessing – so effective in organising work that we would become dependent on it, but so equally effective in dehumanising work that we would become enslaved to it.

Managed collegiality, thus, offers a paradoxical form of freedom – autonomy for the organisation but not for the academic professional. Academic professionalism is redefined as compliance with bureaucratic performance systems. In this new version of collegiality, the professional academic becomes a manager of metrics, not moral purpose. Professionalism is thus emptied of its collegial content such that self-regulation gives way to self-monitoring and moral identity yields to performative accountability.

Managed collegiality gives universities the ability to celebrate their independence from the state while centralising internally so that faculties lose their independence to the university (Musselin, 2009). As Khurana (2007) observed, in the modern business school, academic freedom becomes redefined not as freedom of thought but rather as freedom to manage. What remains is thin proceduralism – meetings, committees, and performance reviews – all of which are divorced from the moral substance of academic life – the pursuit and diffusion of knowledge devoted to a higher purpose. The business school, thus, becomes a purely technical instrument, a managed profession governed by its own administrative apparatus's quest for growth and efficiency rather than a higher societal calling.

Managerial Pathologies

Scholars of bureaucracy understand well how the efficiency of bureaucracy can generate unintended consequences. Ginsberg (2011) provocatively refers to these unintended consequences as ***managerial pathologies***. The proliferation of rules, identified by March et al. (2000) is one such pathology. Not only do rules beget more rules, a change in one rule reverberates throughout the ecology of rules and, in the process, requires a new cadre of managerial professionals whose role is to manage rules. An associated pathology is that the capacity to understand and navigate the ecology of rules creates a new form of expertise, separate from and increasingly superior to the expertise of traditional academic expertise. A third form of managerial pathology is that, as administration grows in power, there is a tendency to subvert the original goals of the organisation and substitute new goals that serve the purpose of the new expertise. Selznick (1949) termed this process of goal displacement 'co-optation'. The capacity to resist co-optation in a world dominated by a neo-liberal market logic is very difficult. In his article ***The Critical Business School and the University: A Case Study of Resistance and Co optation***, Martin Parker (2021) argues that even a business school founded with a disruptive, 'critical management studies' mission can become absorbed into the very market logic it seeks to challenge. He observes that his school's resistance to commodification and managerialism gradually gave way to institutional pressures (performance ratings, accreditation, revenue targets) that effectively co-opted its critical ambitions into the dominant university/business-school model.

Crafting Collegiality

If administrative bloat represents the loss of moral purpose in universities, then crafting collegiality is the effort to recover it. Any viable solution must begin by recognising that bureaucracy and managerialism are not merely technical systems of coordination but moral orders that privilege control, efficiency, and accountability over reflection, deliberation, and shared vocation. To counter this drift, universities—and particularly business schools—must cultivate forms of governance that are neither nostalgic nor naïvely oppositional but consciously crafted around moral, intellectual, and aesthetic values. The solution, according to Weber, is to re-enchant the world [*die Entzauberung der Welt*], by which he meant the need to restore meaning, spirituality, or moral depth within a rationalised and instrumental modern world (Suddaby et al., 2017).

Martin Parker (2021) observes that critical resistance to managerialism cannot be sustained through discourse alone. His case study of a 'critical business school' – i.e. one that actively resisted administrative control - illustrates how even institutions founded on radical critique are quickly co-opted by the performative demands of accreditation, rankings, and financial performance. To avoid such co-optation, Parker argues, critique must be embodied in institutional design. This entails creating organisational spaces that encourage pluralism of thought, resist homogenising metrics, and nurture dissent as a collegial virtue rather than a managerial threat. Crafting collegiality, in this sense, requires restoring universities as communities of difference—where intellectual diversity, critical reflection, and the slow, dialogical work of thought are valued over procedural conformity.

Selznick (1949) offers a complementary insight in his book *Leadership in Administration*. For Selznick, leadership is not the exercise of authority but the infusion of organisations with value and purpose. A leader's task is to ensure that administrative systems serve, rather than subvert, the institution's moral commitments. In the university context, this means aligning bureaucratic routines with the moral ends of education and research rather than allowing them to become ends in themselves. Leadership, as Selznick conceived it, is a moral craft: it requires attentiveness to the character of the institution, care for its founding ideals, and the courage to defend its integrity against instrumental pressures. Crafting collegiality thus entails cultivating leaders who act as custodians of moral purpose rather than as managers of metrics.

Finally, the language of craft provides both a metaphor and a method for restoring collegiality. Craft work embodies a moral and spiritual relation to labour: it values skill, patience, and material engagement over abstraction and speed. In my work on craft, I have argued that re-enchantment lies in reintroducing meaning into practice—where work becomes a vocation rather than an occupation, and where the doing itself carries moral weight (Suddaby and Sharma, 2025). Collegiality, viewed as a craft, depends on similar sensibilities. It demands care in deliberation, respect for materials (ideas, people, institutions), and a shared commitment to producing something of enduring value. Like the craftsperson who resists the alienation of industrial production, the collegial scholar resists the depersonalisation of managerial rule by re-embedding moral and aesthetic judgment into the governance of academic life.

Taken together, Parker, Selznick, and the craft tradition point toward a common project: to craft collegiality as a moral vocation. This involves designing institutional spaces that reward reflection and dialogue, selecting leaders who embody moral stewardship, and embracing academic work as a craft through which meaning, not metrics, becomes the measure of value. In doing so, universities might begin to reverse the drift of administrative bloat—not through further managerial reform, but through the slow and deliberate re-cultivation of the moral imagination that once animated the collegium.

Conclusion: Re-enchanting Management Education Through Public Value

The challenge, then, is not whether universities—and business schools in particular—can be managed more efficiently, but whether they can be governed in ways that preserve and cultivate meaning. Deans of business schools operate at a pivotal fault line. On the one hand, they are held accountable by rankings, accreditation regimes, and increasingly rigid performance metrics. On the other hand, they remain custodians of institutions whose legitimacy ultimately rests on claims of societal contribution, intellectual stewardship, and moral purpose. The risk is that, when value is defined too narrowly, leadership itself collapses into administration.

One way forward lies in revisiting an older and more expansive conception of value—what Mark Moore (1995) famously termed public value. In contrast to private value (profit) or procedural value (efficiency, compliance, metrics), public value directs attention to the collective goods institutions exist to serve. For business schools, this includes—but is not limited to—educating responsible leaders, producing knowledge that improves organisational and societal life, and sustaining spaces for critical reflection on capitalism itself. Importantly, public value does not reject managerial reasoning; it reorients it. It asks leaders to judge success not only by outputs and indicators, but by whether institutional actions advance shared social purposes.

Framed in these terms, re-enchanting management education is not a romantic return to a pre-bureaucratic past, nor a rejection of accreditation or accountability. Rather, it is an invitation for deans to recover leadership as a moral craft. This entails resisting the drift toward goal displacement, protecting collegial deliberation as a source of wisdom rather than interference, and ensuring that administrative systems remain means rather than ends. It also requires courage: the willingness to defend pluralism, dissent, and intellectual risk in environments increasingly governed by standardisation.

Business schools are uniquely positioned to lead this transformation. Having been early adopters—and exporters—of managerial logic across the university, they can now model its reform. By broadening the definition of value that underpins strategy, governance, and evaluation, deans can begin to realign managerial professionalism with collegial purpose. In doing so, they may help restore universities not simply as efficient organisations, but as institutions worthy of vocation—places where education and research are once again animated by meaning, responsibility, and public value.

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