TON KALLENBERG

10. INTERACTING SPHERES REVISITED

Academics and Administrators between Dualism and Cooperation

INTRODUCTION

Loosely Coupled Systems

Some time ago, Weick (1976) described the organisational characteristics of educational institutions as 'loosely coupled systems'. He described this system on the basis of different tasks and the (hierarchical) positions of academics and administrators, in which many actors did as they wished and were not overly concerned with each other. This may still be an on-going situation. Although there is interaction between academics and administrators, each group is strongly committed to its own identity. Academics and administrators are in themselves not to be perceived as unified groups. It would be better to think of them as an interlinked patchwork of coalitions. This applies to academics, who are divided into departments, branches or institutes, that each fight and compete for a satisfactory volume of educational and research projects. It applies equally to the administrators, who are divided into all kinds of services, staffs and sections concerned with different areas (e.g. finance, human resources, strategy, housing, marketing).

The existence of coalitions and the presence of weak links resulted in the situation that, for many years, higher educational institutions have formed a strongly 'ecological' whole, with great stability and resilience against external and internal disturbances (Kovac et al., 2003; Stensaker, 2015). Educational institutions may adapt from the outside, that is to say ceremonially, to rules and procedures in order to gain legitimacy. This adaption is at odds with the nature of the primary process: education and research. To prevent tension, a disconnect occurs in which the primary process is covered and kept out of sight of superiors and the outside world (Meyer, Scott, & Rowan, 1983). This covering serves, among other things, to protect against upheavals. It can also be a conscious decision by the administration. Middle managers in particular can act as a buffer between primary activities and upheavals (Kallenberg, 2013). Departments or faculties have their own freedom of policy in terms of shaping their educational program and pedagogy.

Universities are also a good example of organisations where the administration is unable to control and standardise in detail the goings on of academics. Within the educational organisation, professors can avoid scrutiny and too much influence from

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managers by withdrawing into their specialty. Academics work closely with their clients (patients, students) and with their colleagues. They often feel most affiliation to their self-governing associations which set their standards (Teelken, 2012). Knowledge is power, and knowledge lies with the academics. This 'craftsmanship' stands for well-functioning day-to-day business at the university. However, the fact remains that lecturers are often seen as a potential source of resistance to change at universities (Chandler, Barry, & Clark, 2002). Due to the weak links, the separate parts of the organisation can focus on their own environment and thus respond well to the complexity of that environment. They have sufficient flexibility, partly because the organisation does not need to adapt to changed circumstances as a whole. However, a negative effect is the difficulty that discrete units have in influencing other parts of the organisation. The weak links thus apply to both academics and administrators as separate groups, as well as within these groups.

Organised Anarchy and Garbage Can Model

The loosely coupled system and this lack of commitment brings unclear decision-making processes within the universities. The university is seen as an organised anarchy and the decision-making process as a garbage can model (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; In 't Veld, 1984; Selmer-Anderssen, 2013).

Organised anarchy has three general characteristics. First, there are *problematic* preferences in which people act without clearly defined goals. The danger is that if they do define their preference with some precision, it quickly leads to conflicts. Second, there is an *unclear* technology. The organisational processes are not very well understood by the different actors in the university. They *do* understand the purpose of their own job, but they *do not* get the bigger picture of the organisation. Third, there is a *dynamic participation*. Employees can participate or exclude themselves from the decision-making process. The boundaries of the process are therefore dynamic. The time and energy spent by employees on different subjects varies. Even within a given area their involvement will vary from time to time.

Factually, you can identify four flows, namely *problems, solutions, participants,* and *choices*. Each of these flows takes on a life of its own, largely unrelated to the others. Metaphorically speaking you could say that this type of organisation is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they may be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision makers looking for work (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 1).

Organisational Transformations?

Although the concept of loosely coupled systems has also been criticised for its inability to make the concept meaningful in improving the functioning of educational organisations (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Rowan, 2002), the concepts of loosely coupled systems and organised anarchy (De Ruijter, 2014) cannot yet be dismissed

from the academic world. Still, universities have undergone enormous changes in recent decades, causing universities as organisations to transform into organisational actors, i.e. integrated, goal-oriented, and competitive entities that increasingly behave like strategic actors and less like loosely coupled systems (Krücken & Meier, 2006; De Boer et al., 2007). A globalised and competitive world has arisen in which higher education institutions (HEIs) are under increasing pressure to perform and excel in order to push them towards differentiation and furthermore to distinguish themselves from competing organisations. HEIs have been given more autonomy in exchange for accepting more accountability, monitoring and reporting. There is more focus on educational governance and therefore governments and universities invest heavily in steering, management and control mechanisms. Through mission articulation, strategic planning, evaluation and commercial marketing, HEIs seek to ensure that they become more entrepreneurial, adaptive and commercially responsive (Meek et al., 2010). As a result of these changes, the traditional distinction between academics and administrators is shifting.

Firstly, there is a growing managerial trend with a substantial drive towards greater accountability to paymasters, including performance management, teaching and research quality inspection, performance indicators and target setting (Deem, 2004; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Anderson, 2008; Kolsaker, 2008; Smeenk et al., 2009; Meek et al., 2010; Hyde et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2014). Secondly, this stronger focus on managerialism leads, within universities, to the development of new groups of agents referred to as blended professionals, new professionals (Klumpp & Teichler, 2008) or *third space professionals* (Whitchurch, 2006).

This chapter therefore focuses on the question of how academics, administrators and their subgroups currently relate to each other. To this end, the following section will focus on the relationship between the groups of academics and administrators. Section 3 will then examine the origins of the so-called third space professionals. Section 4 contains the research design after which section 5 will outline the research results. The article will conclude in section 6 with a discussion and conclusions.

THE INTERACTING SPHERES MODEL

For a long time, universities have been considered as hybrid organisations in which two groups, academics and administrators, work independently of each other. Academics are engaged with the primary tasks of the organisation, namely education and research. Administrators are focused on the management and support of the primary process. A distinction can be made between two types of support, namely pure administrative tasks (human resources; finance & control; computerisation & automation, marketing & communication, facility management, legal affairs) and sector-specific tasks (educational and research support). Administrators seek to control, plan and evaluate as guarantees of success, while academics just seek to avoid (too much) control and management, especially if it is blocking them or is inconsistent with what they want to do.

Both groups try to influence each other, and at the same time they also try to maintain the most autonomous possible position relative to each other. This is also termed the basic conflict between academics and administrators. Hanson (2001) described it in a model which has become well known as the *Interacting Spheres Model* (see Figure 1). Conflict and dysfunctional behaviour arise from overbearing hierarchy, vehement disagreements and insufficient dialogue, respect and acceptance of each other's expertise.

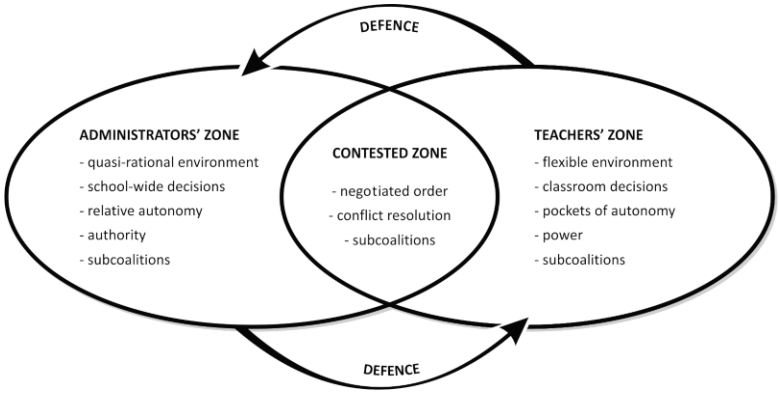

Figure 1. Interacting spheres model (Hanson, 2001)

Hanson describes administrators and academics as each having their own decision-making domain. For administrators, these decisions involve, for instance, budgets, resources and potential (strategic) cooperation with other organisations. These are mostly of a formal nature. For academics, it involves decisions that are directly related to the implementation of educational and/or research duties, which are the primary tasks of HEIs. These decisions are often of an informal nature. Academics and administrators often come together in meetings to create a common area within which issues can be raised. In this area they may have a power struggle to decide on organisational and operational policies. Hanson (2001) called this area the 'contested zone'. Procedures such as democratic decision-making, conflict resolution, and negotiation are employed in an attempt to reduce conflicts in the overlapping area.

On either side, members from one area employ direct and indirect means to influence members of the other area. Both spheres of influence have resources to protect themselves against this. A lecturer may note for instance: "that is not in the interest of my students"; or *say* "yes" but *do* "no". Conversely, administrators also have an array of resources to curb the influence of the academics. In other words, each sphere defends itself, to a certain extent, against outside interference. With this model, Hanson shows that the strict, theoretical separation between the domain of academics and the domain of administrators does not correspond with reality. The main conclusion of Hanson's research is that within each category, decisions were

found that belong to the management zone, educational zone or the contested zone. Hanson further notes that within each zone, subgroups and sub coalitions are active, all pursuing their own form of autonomy.

As a result of the transformation that universities undergo, it is inevitable that the organisational units – and thus the academics and administrators – are increasingly forced into a relationship with each other and can no longer easily withdraw into their own speciality. There is, therefore, all the more reason for a clash between the academics' and the administrators' logic and that can create problems, for example, because they speak different 'languages'. Therefore, to ensure a fruitful dialogue, it is important not to over-indulge in the idiom from one's own domain. This increased interaction between the two spheres has led to the emergence of the so-called new professionals, also termed third-space professionals. This new group will be discussed in the next section.

THIRD SPACE PROFESSIONALS

The growth of size and political-administrative changes that universities have undergone in recent decades have had a major impact on the organisation and also on the way in which the academics and administrators relate to each other.

First, as a result of the growth of size, more specialised tasks and functions as well as larger and more differentiated sections, departments and services have emerged. This differentiation of tasks and functions led to further development of the operating system, because more coordination and interaction proved necessary. Such coordinating mechanisms resulted in the emergence of more workgroups and discussion groups, in which it also proved necessary to establish an abundance of rules and procedures for the various forms of meetings ("who is responsible for what?").

As a result of the political and administrative changes regarding decentralisation and greater autonomy, many tasks e.g., control of funding – have shifted from the central government to the organisations. Within the organisations, this has led to an increase in the number of administrators. Previously, permission was needed from someone at the ministry to purchase a new desk, now, for the same purchase, permission is needed from an employee from the Estates department. *Second*, partly due to the associated increase in attention to quality assurance, oversight and accountability, these specialised tasks and functions have acquired more 'power' within the academic organisations. Both these effects (more specialised functions with a new power factor) have the side effect of bureaucratisation. Although bureaucracy also contributes to transparency and predictability of behaviour and thus protects people against arbitrariness, the risks that accompany scale-ups and bureaucratisation in large educational organisations have to be faced (Wilson, 1989).

The balance between the two domains is shifting in favour of the administrative domain. It is a trend that is visible throughout the HE sector. Rhoades & Sporn (2002) examined the relationship between academic and non-academic staff in the USA and found that the proportion of academic staff as part of overall staff at

American universities had dropped from 69.3% (1976) to 61.0% (1995), whereas the proportion of non-academic staff increased from 30.7% to 39%. They assume that academic work is no longer carried out only by the individual academic. Instead, it is increasingly influenced by many different players, especially managerial professionals. Similar results emanate from other countries, like Norway (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004), Finland (Visakorpi, 1996), United Kingdom (McClintock, 1998), the Netherlands (Blank & Haelermans, 2008) and Germany (Krücken et al., 2013). The Dutch Education Council (2004a, 2004b), for example, stated that the additional spending on higher education, in the last twenty years, had been entirely on overheads. While the average expenditure per student per year in that period decreased by 30% to 40%, the overhead expenses of university education increased by one-third. Typical of this shift is not only the increased percentage of non-academics, but also an increase in the number and differentiation of highly specialised administrative functions within the domain of non-academics (Zellweger-Moser & Bachmann, 2010; Gordon & Whitchurch, 2010).

This has led to the creation of new organisational units and management positions. These management positions are mostly located at the interface between academic, administrative and university leadership. According to several authors, persons working in such units can neither be seen as part of the routine administration nor do they belong to the academic staff (Whitchurch, 2004; Klumpp & Teichler, 2008; Harman & Stone, 2006; Zellweger-Moses & Bachmann, 2010). As a result, a binary division between academic and non-academic roles and activities in higher education is no longer clear cut (Peters, 2004; Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Kogan & Teichler, 2007; Enders & De Weert, 2009). These third space professionals are partly coming from the academics and partly from the administrators. They can be categorised as *academic middle managers and educational administrators*.

Academic middle managers are academics who – in addition to their academic position – are charged with administrative tasks and perform functions such as Academic Director, Head of Study, Education Coordinator, Head of the Examination Board, Vice Dean, Education Director. They take up non-academic duties that are outside their core activities of teaching and research. They are technically part of the university administration (their professional life is governed by rules and regulations applicable to administrative staff) but they have credentials similar to those of the faculty, and perform management and leadership roles that far exceed more bureaucratic tasks (Whitchurch, 2009, 2010).

Educational administrators are administrators charged with educational tasks. They play an important role in developing, supporting and advising on educational activities. They fulfil roles as directors or advisors of educational affairs; quality control, academic skills, programmes etc; and they also show academic aspirations. Educational administrators find themselves betwixt occupational categories, occupational 'hybrids', identifying and identified somewhere between 'mainstream' administrators and academics (Whitchurch, 2006). This type of sandwich position is also acquired by administrative university managers, since they are typically

positioned between the university leadership team and the departments, where most of the academic work is carried out. Furthermore, they frequently have to perform intermediary and translation work in both directions (Krücken et al., 2013; Kallenberg, 2013).

These third space professionals have been introduced in the force field and have an increasing influence on the content and manner in which the initial domains are related to each other. Because they often work between the organisational structure of checks and balances and can work 'under the radar', they are not associated with specific agendas. This causes them to sometimes be regarded as invisible workforces (Rhoades, 2010) or 'secret managers' (Kehm, 2006). They are seen as the lubricant between the domains, reducing the mutual influencing, which creates more understanding for activities in the other domains. They need to be able to work with both the academic and administrative procedures and timescales, as well as the different perceptions of power between academics and administrative staff. Their legitimacy is based on non-positional authority ("it's what you are, not what you represent"); maintaining relationships across the organisation ("if you get the relationships right, everything else falls into place"); and multi-lingual capabilities (interpreting between different constituencies, using language that is acceptable). By being aware of their binding or hinge function, they can use their (tacit) knowledge of what is happening in the organisation to interpret and synthesise this knowledge within the organisation. This strategic dealing with information, and the way in which they use this linking or hinge function, is called the prism-effect (Kallenberg, 2013, 2015).

To summarise: until the end of the last century, universities were regarded as loosely coupled systems, with an ecological balance due to the presence of great differentiation. In addition, academics and administrators relate to each other as interacting spheres, in which both groups try to influence each other. The transformation of universities during the last 15 years towards increased efficiency and effectiveness leads to more clashes between the two spheres of academics and administrators. They have to deal with each other more than before. Partly due to the emergence of more specialised functions, more bureaucracy and more management, a new group of agents has developed: the so-called third space professionals. These are the new buffer between the academics and the administrators and they consist of academic middle managers and educational administrators.

THE RESEARCH

This research focuses on the question of how academics and administrators currently relate to each other and to what extent the subgroups within these spheres function separately from and in relation to each other. It further examines the existence of the third space professional, to what extent this group has actually emerged and what the relationship is between these third space professionals and the spheres of both academics and administrators.

To answer these questions, the chosen research method is an online survey (Surveymonkey). The online questionnaire was distributed among employees at six Dutch universities during May and June of 2015. This study aims to indicatively assess the existence of the third space professional. To map the Dutch situation, the online survey was sent to 1,632 addresses. These addresses were obtained from the universities' websites from six Dutch universities (Leiden, Utrecht, Amsterdam [VU], Groningen, Rotterdam and Nijmegen). The addresses were manually selected to achieve the best possible allocation between representatives of the three different spheres: academics, administrators and the new professionals (academic managers and educational administrators). The 1,632 addresses yielded 548 respondents (31.63%). The raw data set was then analysed and tested for aspects such as normality, relationships between the research variables, missing values and outliers. This has led to 61 respondents being removed from the dataset for various reasons. A workable dataset of 487 respondents remained. No reminder was sent to increase the percentage of respondents, neither was there a non-response study.

The questionnaire sought basic information, including: age, gender, qualifications, nature and organisational location of the post, etc. Furthermore information was collected about the extent to which they experience having an *actual* influence on several processes in the academic and administrative domains and about the extent to which they *want* to have it. Finally information was collected about the extent to which they work together with officials from all domains. The study considers processes on three levels: (1) *curriculum processes* (content, development,

Figure 2. Model of educational processes. The inner circle shows the educational process (curriculum), the next circle shows the education support processes and the outer circle shows the education regulative processes (Kallenberg, 2016)

implementation, and assessment); (2) *education support processes*, such as study & student counselling (scaffolding), education logistics & planning (monitoring), students & exam administration (administrating), educational engineering & infrastructure (facilitating), internal & external communication (communication); and (3) *education regulative processes* (like financial affairs, human resources, governance, quality assurance, strategic issues).

These three levels represent all processes that come up within an educational organisation and can therefore be seen as both a teaching process model and an educational-organisational model: see Figure 2 (Kallenberg, 2016).

The results of the survey provide a quantitative answer to questions of whether there are indeed differences between the spheres and also to what extent they differ from or resemble each another.

RESULTS

General

The number of respondents is 487, of which over 52% is male and 44% is female (4% MV). There is an even spread of age, the average being over 45 years. 62.7% of the respondents belong to the academic staff. Of the academic staff, almost 84% have obtained a doctoral degree (PhD) and the remaining 16% have a Master's (MA or its former Dutch equivalent drs.) title. This remaining group mainly consists of PhD students, but it is notable that 10% of lecturers have not obtained a doctoral degree. Within the administrators' group, more than 11% has obtained a doctoral degree and 34% have an MA title. It is striking that over 22% of the administrators did not obtain a BA degree. These are mainly employees working in administration and communication.

Interacting Spheres and Third Space Professionals

Central to this study are the questions of (1) whether the theory of the interacting spheres model (Hanson, 2001) is still applicable to practice, and (2) whether the so-called third space professional actually exists. The interacting spheres exist when academics and administrators evidently operate "parallel to each other" (i.e. have influence on different subject areas) and mutually try to influence each other. The existence of the third space professional is shown when this group of agents significantly distinguishes itself from the other two groups. Within this study, it is also assumed that the third space professional consists of two sub-groups, namely academic middle managers and educational administrators. So, if the theoretical framework should hold up, these two groups must also behave significantly differently compared to the academics and administrators.

In Table 1, the average scores of the three spheres are presented relative to one another. Table 1 shows that academics and administrators differ significantly from

Table 1. Average scores of the three spheres; separated into influence as experienced and influence as intended. Within brackets, the difference between both is indicated. After the three spheres, the last two columns show the two sub-groups: academic middle managers and educational administrators

	Academics (N = 222)		*Administrators (N = 147)*		*Third space professionals (N = 104)*		*Academic middle managers (N = 72)*		*Educational administrators (N = 32)*	
1 have *2 want to have*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*
content of education	3.55	3.98 (.43)	1.29	1.58 (.29)	3.50	3.66 (.16)	4.26	4.24 (- .02)	1.78	2.38 (.60)
development of education	3.26	3.67 (.41)	1.39	1.63 (.24)	3.55	3.71 (.16)	4.11	4.13 (.02)	2.28	2.78 (.50)
educational practice	3.69	4.00 (.31)	1.34	1.49 (.15)	3.52	3.63 (.11)	4.25	4.27 (.02)	1.84	2.16 (.32)
assessment	3.64	3.86 (.22)	1.34	1.41 (.07)	3.41	3.51 (.10)	4.08	4.08 (.00)	1.84	2.19 (.35)
education logistics & planning	2.01	2.94 (.93)	1.85	1.99 (.14)	2.44	3.11 (.67)	2.61	3.50 (.89)	2.06	2.22 (.16)
educational engineering & infrastructure	1.50	2.35 (.85)	1.50	1.66 (.16)	1.88	2.75 (.87)	1.99	3.07 (1.08)	1.63	2.03 (.40)
students & exam administration	1.54	2.01 (.47)	1.92	1.98 (.06)	2.10	2.57 (.47)	2.01	2.63 (.62)	2.30	2.43 (.13)
internal and external communication	1.80	2.27 (.47)	2.13	2.28 (.15)	2.40	2.93 (.53)	2.49	3.08 (.59)	2.19	2.59 (.40)
study & student guidance	2.16	2.49 (.33)	1.85	2.01 (.16)	2.42	2.62 (.20)	2.38	2.55 (.17)	2.52	2.77 (.25)
financial affairs	1.54	2.27 (.73)	1.48	1.56 (.08)	2.23	2.88 (.65)	2.33	2.97 (64)	2.00	2.69 (.69)
human resources	1.68	2.29 (.61)	1.57	1.79 (.22)	2.54	3.12 (.58)	2.82	3.38 (.56)	1.91	2.53 (.62)
quality assurance	2.09	2.54 (.45)	1.68	1.82 (.14)	3.29	3.43 (.14)	3.36	3.53 (.17)	3.13	3.19 (.06)
governance	2.08	2.63 (.55)	1.78	2.05 (.27)	3.14	3.37 (.23)	3.39	3.51 (.12)	2.55	3.06 (.51)
strategic issues	1.87	2.78 (.91)	1.65	2.05 (.40)	2.95	3.66 (.71)	2.94	3.64 (.70)	2.97	3.72 (.75)

each other, and, furthermore, that the third space professionals significantly differ from both the academics and the administrators.

Academics score high on the processes that are directly related to education. Administrators score fairly low on all processes. This is remarkable, because it was expected that they would score higher on education support processes (this will be discussed in more detail in the following subparagraph). Third space professionals score quite high on all processes. Where the academics' scores dip after the curriculum processes, the third space professionals, for example, also score fairly well on support processes and clearly higher on processes such as quality assurance (M = 3.29) and governance (M = 3.14). These scores indicate that third space professionals experience influence on all subjects, while among academics this influence is restricted to the curriculum processes. The results shown in Table 1 (also illustrated in Figure 3) already indicate that the third space professional can indeed be considered as a separate group of agents.

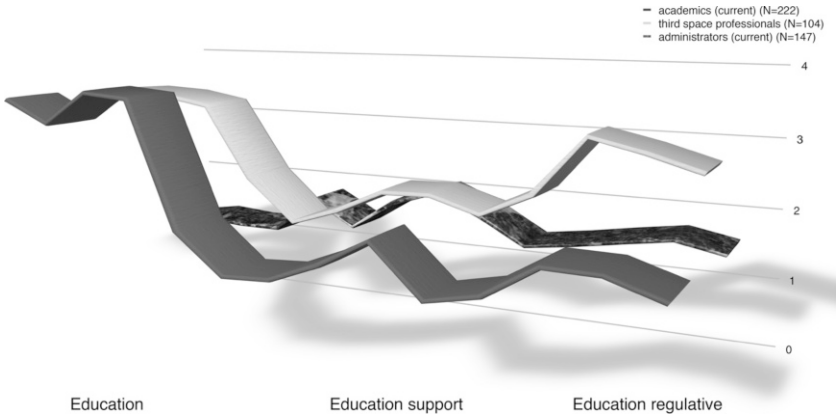

Figure 3. Illustration that shows that the third space professional distinguishes itself from the academics and administrators

A single-variant analysis (one-way ANOVA) has been used in order to indicate possible significant differences between the four groups on the different processes. The single-variant analysis was used for all processes and the results show that for the vast majority of processes there are significant differences between the four distinct groups (academics, administrators, academic middle managers and educational administrators).

Educational/Curriculum Processes

Within the curriculum processes, there is a clear division between academic and non-academic staff. The academics and the academic middle managers score high on these four subjects while the (educational) administrators score low.

1. *Content of education ($F(3.469) = 209.05; p < 0.001$)*. With regard to the content of education it is especially the academic middle manager that claims to experience a high degree of influence (4.26). This score is significantly different from the other three groups. The academic middle managers do not want to have more influence on this subject. Likewise, the academics experience a high degree of influence on this subject (3.55). This, however, is significantly smaller than that which is experienced by the academic middle managers. The academics have ambitions to increase their influence on this subject. The academics and academic middle managers experience significantly more influence than the administrators and educational administrators. These last two groups experienced little influence on this subject, and there is, therefore, no significant difference between the two groups. However, the educational administrators have a strong wish to increase their influence on this subject (.60).
2. *Development of education ($F(3.468) = 130.97; p < 0.001$)*. A similar picture emerges from the results in regard to the development of (new) education (curriculum development, changes in teaching methods). The academic middle manager experiences a lot of influence (4.11) and is satisfied with this amount of influence. The score is significantly different to that of the academics (3.26) and this group would like to increase its level of influence. Both groups differ significantly from the (educational) administrators. The educational administrators also differ significantly from the administrators and, in this area, have an average interest in more influence (.50).
3. *Educational practice ($F(3.467) = 206.65; p < 0.001$)*. Again the results are similar in regard to educational practice. There are significant differences between the four groups, with the exception of the administrators and educational administrators, between which no significant difference exists. The academic middle manager again experiences the greatest amount of influence (4.25). While the influence experienced by the academics is quite large (3.69), it is less than they would like to have.
4. *Assessment ($F(3.468) = 185.99; p < 0.001$).* Regarding the fourth curriculum process, the image is again similar to that of the previous three processes. There was no significant difference between the administrators and educational administrators, but there were significant differences with the other groups. It is noteworthy that only the educational administrators have a slight wish to further increase their influence on this subject (.35).

Education Support Processes

The overall score for education support processes is lower than for the groups as a whole. The average scores are considerably lower for both the academics and the academic middle managers. The administrators score somewhat higher than for the curriculum processes.

1. *Educational logistics & planning (F(3.468) = 6.87; p < 0.001)*. As regards educational logistics and planning, there is no significant difference between the academic middle managers, the academics and the administrators. Striking in this area is the great wish from both academics and academic middle managers to gain more influence (respectively .93 and .89). Apparently academic employees really want to improve, for instance, the class timetables.
2. *Educational engineering & infrastructure (F(3.469) = 5.57; p < 0.05)*. Concerning educational engineering and infrastructure, there is again a significant difference between the academic middle managers on the one hand and the academics and administrators on the other. Again there is a strikingly great wish among academics and academic middle managers for more influence on these processes (respectively .85 and 1.08). Also noteworthy is that all groups experience little influence (all groups score lower than 2.00).
3. *Student & exam administration (F(3.460) = 6.94; p < 0.001)*. That the student and exam administration does not belong to the sphere of the academics is clearly shown in their scores. As a group, they score significantly lower than the other three groups. There is, however, an average wish for more influence among academics (.47). The academic middle managers have a very high need for more influence (.62).
4. *Internal and external communication (F(3.467) = 6.77; p < 0.001)*. The academics also score lowest on internal and external communication. This difference is only significant with the academic middle managers. Again in this area, there is an average wish for more influence among academics (0.47). They share this average wish with the educational administrators (.40), while the academic middle managers have a great wish for more influence on this area (.59).
5. *Study & student guidance (F(3.469) = 4.26; p < 0.373)*. The study and student guidance scores diverge from all other scores in terms of significance. In this case, there is only a significant difference between the academic middle managers and the administrators. Furthermore, there is no or only a slight wish (academics .33) for more influence on this process.

Education Regulative Processes

In the educational regulative processes, the differences between groups become greater again. The academic middle managers, in particular, score significantly higher than the other groups on all of the different processes.

1. *Financial affairs (F(3.469) = 13.34; p < 0.001)*. In financial affairs, there is a significant difference between the academic middle managers and academics and administrators. The difference with the educational administrators is not significant. In all cases, the experienced influence on financial affairs is quite limited in all groups. At the same time, there is a very great wish among three

groups to have more influence on financial affairs: academics (.73), academic middle managers (.64), and educational administrators (.69).

2. *Human resources ($F(3.469) = 23.69; p < 0.001$)*. Academic middle managers experience significantly more influence than the other three groups in regard to human resources. Again, academic middle managers have a great wish for more influence (.56) and academics (.61) and educational administrators (.62) have an even greater wish for more influence.
3. *Quality assurance ($F(3.466) = 38.03; p = 0.077$)*. Quality assurance is traditionally the field of the educational administrators. There is no significant difference between them and the academic middle managers. However, there is a significant difference with the other groups (academics and administrators). The academics have an average wish to have more influence on this process.
4. *Governance ($F(3.465) = 34.28; p = .465$)*. Regarding governance, there is a significant difference between the academic middle manager and the other three groups. In addition, the difference between the educational administrator and administrators is also significant. Both the academics (.55) and the educational administrators (.51) have a great wish for more influence.
5. *Strategic issues ($F(3.466) = 31.45; p < 0.05$)*. Academic middle managers and educational administrators indicate that they have significantly more influence in the field of strategic issues than the academics and administrators. The degree of influence is thought to be limited by all groups, as each group indicates it wants more influence on strategic issues. Administrators have an average wish for more influence (.40) and the other three groups have a very great wish for more influence: academics (.91), academic middle managers (.70) and educational administrators (.75).

Administrators in Subgroups

Administrators work on many different processes in often diverse departments. In order to assess whether the administrators can be seen as *sui generis*, the statements about their experienced influence on the different processes are represented per subgroup in the table below.

As a group, the administrators generally scored rather low in the various processes, in many of which the average score of a whole group did not exceed 2.00. By presenting an image per department/type in the table below, a different image of the administrators is presented. It becomes clear that each department scores notably higher on its own processes, and also that different departments experience little to no influence other than those that take place within or close to their department. It may therefore be said that administrators experience few connecting processes, and, perhaps, that they do not feel responsible for them. However, due to the fact that the number of respondents in each group is very small, no valid conclusions can be drawn from this.

Table 2. Average scores of the administrators broken down by process

	Educational logistics & planning (N=12)	*Educational engineering & infrastructure (N=26)*	*Students & exam administration (N=36)*	*International & external communicating (N=26)*	*Study & student guidance (n=14)*	*Financial affairs (N=6)*	*Human resources (N=9)*	*Governance (N=34)*
Content of education	1.50	1.08	1.22	1.23	1.64	1.17	1.00	1.62
Educational development	2.00	1.27	1.14	1.42	1.79	1.17	1.00	1.67
Educational practice	1.33	1.12	1.47	1.19	1.36	1.17	1.00	1.67
Assessment	2.17	1.23	1.28	1.08	1.36	1.17	1.00	1.76
Educational logistics & planning	3.00	1.31	1.97	1.23	3.71	1.50	1.00	1.91
Educational engineering & infrastructure	1.67	2.46	1.14	1.19	1.50	1.67	1.00	1.50
Students & exam administration	3.08	1.42	2.54	1.15	2.79	1.20	1.00	2.13
Internal and external communication	2.58	1.35	1.61	3.85	2.71	2.00	1.11	2.09
Study & student guidance	2.42	1.19	1.61	1.31	4.71	1.17	1.00	2.30
Financial affairs	1.67	1.35	1.42	1.50	1.07	4.17	1.00	1.88
Human resources	1.42	1.46	1.44	1.38	1.00	2.50	3.33	1.82
Quality assurance	2.27	1.52	1.42	1.46	2.36	1.83	1.00	3.12
Governance	2.33	1.46	1.39	1.92	2.07	3.00	1.33	2.52
Strategic issues	1.67	1.54	1.36	2.08	1.43	2.50	1.22	2.94

Table 2 shows that administrators experience little to no influence on curriculum processes. Similarly, it appears that there is a difference between the departments dealing with educational support processes and departments that deal with educational regulative processes.

In the educational support processes, there is an overlap between the departments of educational logistics & planning and study & student guidance. Both score quite high on several educational support processes. The score of the study & student guidance on their own process could even be considered very high (4.71). It is also

remarkable that the three other departments only experience influence on their own process. Moreover, other than educational engineering & infrastructure itself, no other department experiences any significant influence on this particular process.

In the educational regulative processes, it is clear that the human resources department is also positioned quite independently. There is only a small degree of coordination with the financial affairs. Financial affairs both experiences great influence on its own processes (4.17) and coordination with human resources, governance and strategic issues.

Academics in Subgroups

The academics in this report have been divided into three groups, namely professors, (senior) lecturers and PhD students/researchers. The groups were not further broken down according to field of study, as the subgroups would become too small to draw significant conclusions.

Table 3. Academic subgroups and their experienced influence on the different processes

	Professors (N=129)	*(Senior) Lecturers (N=125)*	*PhD students/ researchers (N=37)*
content of education	3.98	3.82	2.49
development of education	3.60	3.65	2.36
educational practice	3.99	3.95	2.92
assessment	3.87	3.98	2.54
education logistics & planning	2.29	2.31	1.46
educational engineering & infrastructure	1.72	1.68	1.27
students & exam administration	1.73	1.72	1.31
internal and external communication	2.24	1.89	1.30
study & student guidance	2.36	2.31	1.59
financial affairs	2.32	1.36	1.14
human resources	2.66	1.52	1.22
quality assurance	2.90	2.20	1.41
governance	3.11	1.99	1.28
strategic issues	2.89	1.67	1.14

Table 3 shows that professors and (senior) lecturers experience a great influence on the curriculum processes. In this respect, they differ significantly from the PhD students. For the other subprocesses, the professors generally experience a

reasonable degree of influence, with the exception of the educational engineering & infrastructure and the students & exam administration. Another striking difference between professors and (senior) lecturers is that professors experience a (much) greater influence on the education regulative processes. The PhD students only experience some significant influence on the curriculum processes and (almost) none on the other processes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Central to this research were the questions of (1) whether the theory of the interacting spheres model (Hanson, 2001) is still present in practice, and (2) whether the so-called third space professional actually exists. It was illustrated in the previous paragraph that both questions can clearly be answered in the affirmative.

The academics and administrators still relate to each other as Hanson has described in the interacting spheres model. They both try to influence each other. There are, however, clearly observable differences in the processes in which the various groups claim to experience influence. There are also differences in the processes in which the different sub-groups want to have more influence, or, in other words, in which processes the sub-groups want to influence each other more. The wish for more influence is clearly greater on the part of the academics than on the part of the administrators. Examples of a very great wish for more influence among academics lie within the area of education support processes, especially in the educational planning & logistics (.93) and the educational engineering & infrastructure (.85). The interviews show that this wish originates from the strong desire for better scheduling of (their own) teaching and better support as regards the use of IT in teaching. With regard to education regulative processes, academics especially want more influence on the processes of financial affairs (.73) and strategic issues (.91). The administrator has relatively little ambition to further increase its influence on processes. The margins in this area are relatively small compared to the existing situation. Only in the area of strategic issues does there exist an average wish (.40) to gain more influence in this area.

Likewise, the statements by Weick on the loosely coupled systems within the university still have value today. The truth of these statements is shown in, for instance, the apparent ‘patchwork’ of the different departments within the administration (non-academic staff). Each department experiences influence on its own processes, but is not much involved in other processes nor does it wish to be: it is ‘every (wo)man for him/herself’. This means that that the ecological balance of the university is still intact with its great stability and resilience against external and internal disturbances. In other words: while there is currently a greater emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency, it is difficult to align the various actors within the university in terms of priorities and directions.

The emergence of the third space professionals has led to a new specialised buffer zone between academics and administrators. This group of agents interferes

with many different processes. An advantage is that this third space professional is knowledgeable and therefore in a unique position to connect processes and spread them throughout the organisation. The disadvantage is that, through the emergence of the extra buffer zone, the administrators and academics seem to be increasingly separated from each other, and as a result it's more difficult to influence the processes in the other domain.

Third space professionals consist of two clearly separated subgroups. The academic middle manager experiences more influence than the educational administrator on all processes. The educational administrator could therefore be considered as an assistant to the academic middle manager.

The academic middle manager is the person within the organisation who experiences the greatest influence on the various processes. S/he plays a pivotal role in the organisation and has a connecting function with the various layers of the organisation. This type of manager is situated in the centre of the interaction. They also, in addition to their connecting or hinge function, use and spread tacit knowledge, including that gained within the various processes throughout the organisation; and this is called the *prism-effect* of the academic middle manager (Kallenberg, 2013, 2015).

Despite academic middle managers already experiencing the greatest influence, they also have the greatest wish to further increase their influence, especially in respect of the education support processes and the education regulative processes, concerning which they have a very great wish for more influence.

The educational administrator also desires more influence. On the one hand, this wish is great for curriculum processes. On the other, it is also great for the education regulative processes (financial affairs, human resources and strategic issues). It appears that this group, in addition to the academic middle managers, is developing within the university and forms a so-called 'fourth power'. After all, it is clear that the academic middle manager is the agent with the most control. The fact that a director of education or a Vice Dean is often assisted by a senior official could lead to educational administrators also working within these processes with their own agenda, possibly as regards the processes of efficiency and effectiveness.

The next question that can be asked is whether the formation of this new group of agents actually leads to something or if it is just an additional group of agents that further swells the ranks of the bureaucracy. After all, the discussion about the growing size of the administrative staff is currently still relevant within the Dutch universities. Although the administrative staff has negative connotations and is often associated with bureaucracy or the 'fat' of the organisation, this discussion is often about the volume of officialdom, not their practical use. If it is, in fact, true that the educational administrators will develop as a 'fourth power', this development could lead to a shifting balance within the interacting spheres.

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