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## The Dark Side of Leadership: Identifying and C Unethical Practice in Organizations

Performance ≠ Leadership: Shifting Institutional Research Performance  
Scott Eacott

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# PERFORMANCE ≠ LEADERSHIP: SHIFTING INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PERFORMANCE

Scott Eacott

## ABSTRACT

*University administrators are increasingly using a range of metrics to evaluate the “quality” of work being undertaken at their institutions. The unit of analysis for these assessments varies from Department (England), field of research (Australia), and the like, but inevitably the assessment works its way to individual researchers. This poses a major challenge for administrators and even more so for researchers. Shifts in institutional policy to meet the challenges of funding and reputation/esteem of rising in the ranks raise a number of questions concerning the temporality and value of academic labor. Notably, decisions about the worth of academic labor are often well removed from the undertaking of that labor and this separation removes the human side of scholarly work and reduces knowledge production to numerical indicators and the achievement of key performance indicators. In this chapter I draw on shifts in an institution’s policy position and the impact that this has on researchers. Particularly I explore the implications of historically mapping research performance using different metrics than were available at the time and expecting researchers to adopt alternate strategies*

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*immediately (irrespective of delays in the publication process). Although I do not doubt that administrator decisions are arguably made in the best interests of advancing the institutions position in the increasingly global academy, the presentism of such strategies is in many ways at odds with the long-term focus of building coherent and sophisticated research programs. Alternate means of understanding the challenges and tensions of administrator strategy has the potential to impact on policy and the development of programs for current and aspiring researchers.*

**Keywords:** Research assessment; research leadership; relational theory; academic labour; education research; educational administration

## INTRODUCTION

On an international scale the ranking of universities has become increasingly important for the recruitment of faculty, students, attracting industry partners, collaborators, and benefactors. Although rankings favor particular (older) universities, rising in the rankings is incredibly important for building a university's brand (Shin, Toutkoushian, & Teichler, 2011; Webber & Calderon, 2015). This is achieved through the various forms of prestige and influence that one can assert in the highly competitive knowledge economy. With increasing fiscal pressure, public funds for universities have contracted, and governments are looking to invest more strategically in areas of national importance (e.g., health, defense, energy, food production) and those generating the greatest economic return on investment. The burden of proof is increasingly being pushed back on to universities, and ultimately individual researchers, with decisions regarding what is (and is not) "quality" labor having far-reaching implications (Petersen, 2009).

With attention on effectiveness and efficiency, a legacy of Taylorism, institutional performance (particularly positive organizational change) requires decisions to be made about what and who to invest in. Such decisions are based on a pre-existing normative orientation toward what is "quality" scholarly activity, or in other words, what is of *worth*. However, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006[1991]) argue that society does not have a single order of worth. Instead, there are multiple orders at play at any one time. This poses a challenge for research administrators seeking to organize the activity of academics who, due to the nature of their work, are frequently part of global networks of scholars as much, if not more so, than local. National research assessment exercises mobilize metrics, such as journal rankings, that are often parochial rather than universal and even

popular versions rarely go beyond outlets (e.g., journals) as proxies for individual article quality. This is not to mention the variety of assumptions regarding the audiences/end-users of research or how to measure the impact of knowledge production. The application of journal rankings as a sole criterion for assessing “quality” against “non-quality” outputs and assuming a stability of the measure quantifies scholarly activity in a particular way. Although it may be possible that such actions lead to increased institutional ranking in assessment exercises in the now, the narrow view of what is academic publishing requires a rethinking of leadership – one that goes beyond improvements in performance – and implications for the forthcoming (see also *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, Volume 15, Issue 4).

In this chapter I problematize, with reference to a *relational* approach to scholarship (Eacott, 2015), the improvement of research ranking at a particular institution. Specifically, I argue that a fragile agreement on what constitutes a “quality” research output, the dislocation of temporality from practice and the artificial construction of binaries (“quality” and “non-quality”) means that improvement in institutional performance – that which is usually equated with leadership – can come at a significant cost. Significantly, I claim that the rapid rise in national research rankings can obscure a dark side of leadership.

## A “TURNAROUND” LEADER?

As with many countries, Australia has introduced a research assessment exercise – the Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA). There have currently been three iterations of the ERA – 2010, 2012, and 2015 – with the next iteration scheduled for 2018. The ERA is intended as a comprehensive quality evaluation of all research produced in Australian universities against national and international benchmarks (see [www.arc.gov.au/excellence-research-australia](http://www.arc.gov.au/excellence-research-australia)). Using a range of indicators, institutions meeting threshold values (e.g., minimum number of staff and outputs) are assessed on a five-point scale (ranging from 1 – well below world standard through to 5 – well-above world standard) in various disciplines. For the purposes of ERA, disciplines are defined as two-digit ( $n = 22$ , e.g., “education”) and four-digit ( $n = 57$ , e.g., “education systems,” “curriculum and pedagogy,” “specialist studies in education”) Fields of Research (FoR) codes as identified in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification. There are six-digit FoRs identified, and frequently used at the institutional

level, but ERA data and outcomes are only reported at the two- and four-digit levels. The major distinction between the ERA and the United Kingdom's Research Excellence Framework (REF) is that it assesses FoRs rather than university Departments.

During the first two iterations of the ERA, research performance at the focal institution was not particularly strong (see Table 1). Apart from not being useful for promoting the institution, performance in ERA matters as it is directly linked to government funding via the Research Excellence Index (a measure that makes use of weighted ERA outcomes at the four-digit level). In the lead-up to ERA 2015 the institution recruited a new Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research (DVC-R), from a slightly higher ranking institution, with the aspiration of becoming a leading research university focused on strategic priorities and concentrated investment. The outcomes of ERA 2015 demonstrate that the institution is on a rapid rise trajectory toward achieving its aspiration. It was one of the most improved institutions in the latest iteration of the national Research Excellence Index.

Across the three iterations of the ERA, the performance of the institution at both the two- and four-digit levels has risen, from 1.91 and 2.14, respectively, to 3.10 and 3.60. Most significantly, the average is above three, meaning that the average performance of the institution is now "at world standard." In ERA 2015, and central to any turnaround narrative, there was only one FoR at the four-digit level (out of a possible 15) that was rated "below world standard," while seven (47%) were rated "above" or "well-above world standard." In contrast, only one out of 27 (4%) were

**Table 1.** Institutional Performance across All Fields of Research in ERA 2010, 2012, 2015.

FoR/Year	Rating					Statistics		
	1	2	3	4	5	<i>n</i>	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$
Two-digit								
2010	4	4	3	0	0	11	1.91	0.83
2012	0	6	3	0	0	9	2.33	0.50
2015	0	3	4	2	1	10	3.10	0.99
Four-digit								
2010	3	7	3	1	0	14	2.14	0.86
2012	1	8	4	0	0	13	2.23	0.60
2015	1	0	7	3	4	15	3.60	1.21

rated “above” or “well-above world standard” in the first two iterations. At the two-digit FoR level, 30% (3 out of 10) were rated “above” or “well-above world standard” in ERA 2015 as opposed to zero percent (zero out of 20) in the first two iterations. Overall, this reflects a remarkable turnaround in only three years.

How was this rapid ascension achieved? After all, the arrival of the new DVC-R only took place in the final 12 months of the research collection period (e.g., for outputs 2008–2013, research income, esteem, and applied measures 2011–2013). How is it possible for the research performance of the institution to turnaround so quickly – especially when grant cycles and publication timelines (e.g., submission – review – revision – acceptance – publication) can be so lengthy? To further articulate how this played out for faculty, I will outline the institutional assessment of research outputs in a particular FoR – 1303 Specialist Studies in Education, with specific reference to the six-digit FoR 130304 Educational Administration, Management, and Leadership.

Specialist Studies in Education reflect a diverse group of sub-disciplines within education (see Table 2). The explicit goal of the new DVC-R was that faculty produce only high “quality” work and preferably at quantity.

**Table 2.** 1303 at the Six-Digit Level.

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1303 Specialist Studies in education

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130301 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

130302 Comparative and Cross-Cultural Education

130303 Education Assessment and Evaluation

130304 Educational Administration, Management and Leadership

130305 Educational Counseling

130306 Educational Technology and Computing

130307 Ethnic Education (excl. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Maori and Pacific People)

130308 Gender, Sexuality and Education

130309 Learning Sciences

130310 Maori Education (excl. Early Childhood and Primary Education)

130311 Pacific Peoples Education

130312 Special education and Disability

130313 Teacher Education and Professional Development of Educators

130399 Specialist Studies in Education not elsewhere classified

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Publications that were deemed to be of lower “quality” were to be avoided and research workload would only be granted to those with a track record of, and plan for, “quality” work (using contemporary measures – even if they differ from advice available at the time).

Table 3 displays the overall performance in 1303 of all submitting institutions across the three iterations of the ERA. The bolded values represent where the institution in question was rated. To achieve this rapid rise meant that publications from faculty needed to be focused in perceived high “quality” outlets. In ERA 2010 and in the lead-up to ERA 2012, there was a journal ranking list. This list ranked journals as A\* (considered the top 5% of journals for the field, e.g., *Educational Administration Quarterly*), A (the next 15%, e.g., *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* and *School Leadership and Management*), B (the next 30%), C (the bottom 50%), and some – where Australian researchers had not published – remained unlisted. In ERA 2012, the lists were removed on the basis that they were intended only for ERA 2010 and that many journals had changed significantly in the years since (although rarely reported publicly, the rankings continue to be used in applications for promotion, tenure, and grants). How then were institutions to decide on what is a “quality” publication?

At the institution in question, the process to establish this was multifaceted. In pursuit of “quality” over “quantity,” the ERA benchmarks for FoRs (for 1303 that was 1.6 publications – weighted for authorship – per year and \$36,000 annual research income) were overlaid with a “quality” criterion. The SCImago (<http://www.scimahoojr.com/index.php>) quartile ranking system was adopted. Significantly, it was only the first quartile used (therefore, disregarding the other 75% of listed journals). If a journal fell outside of this first quartile, it was then checked against the now defunct ERA journal rankings. Again, it was only A\* and A journals that counted (disregarding the other 80% of journals listed). The resulting list

**Table 3.** Institution Performance against All Institutions in FoR 1303 in ERA 2010–2015.

	Rating					Statistics		
	1	2	3	4	5	<i>n</i>	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$
2010	6	<b>13</b>	12	4	1	36	2.47	1.00
2012	2	<b>11</b>	16	4	1	34	2.74	0.86
2015	2	11	13	<b>6</b>	3	35	2.91	1.04

was then used against the ERA benchmarks to decide whether an academic was performing above, at, or below disciplinary expectations.

The criteria, despite not being available at the time, were historically mapped onto the previous six years performance. In addition, it was applied – without prior notice – to recently completed applications for research workload (as it was no-longer granted to any staff irrespective of employment conditions – e.g., teaching and research faculty were not guaranteed any time for research). As a result of this process, greater than 50% of faculty had their research workload reduced, if not removed, with many given levels consistent with teaching-only appointments and making it possible to re-classify their positions. These re-classified faculty members could be removed from the ERA submission, reducing the denominator for weighting performance. As collateral damage, faculty who may have met the performance expectation (e.g., sufficient high “quality” outputs) but had an apparent long tail (e.g., outputs not considered “quality”) had their research workloads cut on the basis of perceived inconsistent “quality” performance.

The significant turnaround of the institution in the national level research assessment exercise would usually attract attention for effective leadership. After all, it is often assumed that where there is performance, particularly positive organizational change, there is leadership (Eacott, 2013). The attribution of this leadership is not without complexity. The institutional level research assessment resulted in disharmony among the faculty, especially those who had research workload removed or significantly cut, and it resulted in union intervention (although this intervention did little except to delay implementation by a few months). Faculty who met the DVC-R’s criteria were granted research-intensive (or research-only) positions and the rest of the faculty were given very high teaching workloads to cover the work, denied access to research supports (e.g., conference travel grants, sabbaticals), and ineligible to supervise any new higher degree research students (e.g., PhD, EdD, MPhil, honors) on the assumption that they were poor researchers. Not surprisingly, many faculty left the institution at the time. For those who could not, the conditions of their work now mean they can rarely produce research that would make them competitive for teaching and research positions (the default faculty position in Australia) elsewhere. In summary, the decisions by the DVC-R on who to invest in – using unarticulated criteria – have resulted in a new class-based faculty structure. Although the institution’s ranking has improved, bringing with it all forms of positive attention, the experience for faculty (at least those not among the DVC-R’s chosen ones) has been one of the dark side of leadership.

## APPROACHES TO IMPROVE PRACTICE

It is difficult, almost impossible, to argue with the logic of improving the “quality” of research outputs from the institution. This is however central to the problem. Any decision on “quality” is based on a pre-existing normative orientation – one that is rarely acknowledged yet alone brought into question. As [Gunter and Fitzgerald \(2008\)](#) argue in relation to school performance:

... the demand for evidence is stifling understandings and explanations of practice, and at the same time the self-reverence of a person’s story of their victory in turning round a failing school does little to explain who determines whether a school is failing and for what purposes. (p. 7)

Complicity with everyday language of “quality” means that the term itself remains uncritically adopted – at least the version put forth by the person/s with authority. Simply critiquing the term, or replacing it with another, does little to overcome the problem as the root cause of the issue remains intact. To provide the intellectual resources capable of overcoming these limitations and offer approaches to improve practice, I called upon the five *relational* extensions I articulated in *Educational leadership relationally* ([Eacott, 2015](#), p. 5):

- The centrality of “organizing” in the social world creates an ontological complicity in researchers (and others) and make it difficult to epistemologically break from ordinary language;
- Rigorous social scientific enquiry calls into question the very foundations of popular labels such as “leadership” and “quality”;
- The contemporary social condition cannot be separated from the ongoing, and inexhaustible, recasting, or organizing activity;
- Foregrounding social relations enables the overcoming of the contemporary, and arguably enduring, tensions of individualism/collectivism and structure/agency; and
- In doing so, there is a productive – rather than merely critical – space to theorize educational administration.

### *Ontological Complicity*

Recognizing your own ontological complicity is not about developing some form of operational definition and attempting to create a distance between the object (e.g., “quality” research outputs) and the self. In contrast, it is about recognizing the set of relations that one shares with the object

(Eacott, 2015). In other words, I am more concerned with recognizing our complicity with the object of our attention. In the example provided in this chapter, the DVC-R's core identity in the institution is at stake in the pursuit of "quality." The actions he took legitimize this complicity as he is not only embedded but also embodies the "quality" rhetoric. As a result, he constructed procedures in service of the research object. But it is not entirely the DVC-R's choice. Following Bourdieu (2005[2000]), in heavily administered societies, much like a gravitational field, even the person perceived to have absolute power – or decision-making authority – is him/herself held within the constraints of administration. It is impossible to know who the subject of the final decision is and the place of the decision is both everywhere and nowhere. The DVC-R is not the sole creator of the system, but is complicit in its ongoing expansion and the version of it at the focal institution.

Engaging with, rather than overcoming, this ontological complicity requires an epistemological break (Bachelard, 1984[1934]; Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991[1968]; Eacott, 2015). This means going beyond the ambition of grounding in (rational) action, the arbitrary division of scholarly work (e.g., "quality" and "non-quality") and instead taking as the object of attention the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of scholarship. Rarely in organizations is there adequate time allocated, or prioritized, to dialogue and debate about such matters. However, this is a serious contributor to the issue. The logic of scholarship that of argument and refutation, is not common in the administration of universities. The absence of an explicit recognition of the relations between the actor (DVC-R) and the measures of "quality" is central to the problematic nature of the situation as it unfolded. This is not to say that everyone is going to agree with the position of the DVC-R, but the failure to articulate it is an issue. Articulating one's position, as a form of reflexivity, facilitates dialogue and debate around a potentially over-arching principle (e.g., "quality") by opening the possibility of multiple pathways.

### *Problematizing the Canon*

There is considerable difficulty in assigning a universal and forever more, version of a "quality" scholarly output. In Australia during the last decade there has been a national journal ranking exercises by the Centre for the Study of Research Training and Impact (SORTI) and the Australian Association for Research in Education (Holbrook, Bourke, Preston,

Cantwell, & Scevak, 2007), the ERA ranked and unranked lists, information drawn from elsewhere such as the European Reference Index for the Humanities (which like the ERA originally had a ranked list, but moved to an unranked one), Scopus, Web of Science, and the increasingly popular SCImago. The use, and misuse, of research assessment data and in particular journal rankings has attracted substantial research interest (Hicks, Wouters, Waltman, de Rijcke, & Rafols, 2015; Rushforth & de Rijcke, 2015; Wilsdon et al., 2015). Assessing academic work is not a new phenomenon (Woelert & Yates, 2015), but what the example in this chapter brings to the fore is what data is needed to make decisions on “quality.”

At a disciplinary level, Albion (2012) developed a benchmark for the Australian education professoriate drawing on a range of statistics, but mostly the *h*-index and *g*-index. Significantly, Albion sought to move beyond outlets as proxies for article quality and mobilize engagement (citation) measures. There has also been work specific to educational administration seeking to identify key outlets and the productivity levels of scholars in Australia and elsewhere (Cherkowski, Currie, & Hilton, 2012; Eacott, 2009, 2014; Hallinger & Bryant, 2014; Mayo, Zirkel, & Finger, 2006; Richardson & McLeod, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, Firestone, Hoy, & Johnson, 2000). Although there are some consistencies across these ranking exercises, depending on the question asked and the data used, the results are varied. Unlike the focal institution’s approach, it is possible that there is more than one version of “quality” outlet. Purpose becomes important for assessing the worth of an output, something that may be pursuing a means other than raising the institutions research ranking.

Following the earlier work around ontological complicity, there is an opportunity to problematize “quality” and generate possibilities – or perhaps in more appropriate words, more than one way to do it. Rather than seeking to develop strict criteria for what is, and more importantly is not, “quality” work, it is arguably more productive to seek out an over-arching principle that can be agreed upon. This requires recognition that others might be pursuing different goals but that they are not necessarily incoherent with our own. That is, being open to variance without needing to resort to a form of relativism.

What the DVC-R sought was “quality” work, arguably a pursuit of universal appeal. If we take Boltanski’s work serious, then there are multiple orders of worth in play at any one time. This is why the over-arching principle is important. Rather than privileging criterion, giving centrality to the principle of “quality” enables faculty to defend or justify their publication choices using data appropriate to the work and its purpose (rather than an

external imposed one). Greater significance is granted to empirically defending choices in the face of critique (Boltanski, 2011[2009]; Boltanski and Thévenot (2006[1991])). To do so, faculty could use data from an appropriate source to make the claim that the work is “quality.” The key question is becoming “*how do you know this is quality work?*” instead of “*is it published in a quality outlet?*” Any evidence provided needs to adhere to the over-arching principle of “quality” but the criteria will vary. This is not a neat framework that can be applied to all staff in a highly efficient way, but that does not make it wrong. It works on the idea that in the absence of any alternative, orthodoxy will prevail. Therefore, if an individual can defend their claim to “quality” in the face of critique, it meets the expectation. Significantly, it moves beyond structural accounts that deny any form of agency on the individual while also not falling into the belief that everyone has absolute agency.

There is an assumption built into this line of argument. Going against McGregor’s (1960) work on staff motivation, an assumption in the approach I am promoting is that most staff, most of the time (as I am not convinced that absolutes are useful) do the best work they can under the conditions in which they work. This does not mean that all work is of equal “quality” and I accept that some evaluation and assessment is necessary in the organizing of universities, but the application of a single version of “quality” as was done in the case study of this chapter denies the possibility of alternatives and narrows scholarly work to a set of parameters that may not be achievable, yet alone desirable.

### *Grounding in Time and Space*

Decisions can only be made on the best information available at the time. Historical mapping of research performance against contemporary measures is inappropriate and so too is projecting into the forthcoming as though metrics are stable. In this case, what we see is a misappropriation of data, a partial application of multiple systems overlaid, inaccurately, on a benchmark using different data. The cherry-picking of data from multi-systems and assuming a sense of equivalence is a problematic assumption. Not making the process visible to faculty, especially those completing applications that are to be assessed using these data, are incompatible with contemporary calls for transparency and openness in decision-making, not to mention procedural fairness. If we overlook this series of unethical decisions in the assessment of faculty research, the issue highlights two

concerning practices: (i) the dislocation of evaluation from practice and (ii) assumptions of stability in metrics.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to know in advance how the ranking of a journal may fluctuate in various systems. Therefore, decisions on where to publish are made with the information available at the time. As an example, publications in *Journal of Educational Administration (JEA)* were rewarded in the original ranked ERA list as it was an “A” journal. In the revised list it was relegated to a “C” journal. Despite its quartile one ranking in SCImago, and many other esteem measures, publications in *JEA* were deemed poor “quality” at the institution because it was a “C” rank in a now defunct ranking system. This includes publications appearing when the journal was an “A” rank. The assessment of outputs in this approach is removed from temporal conditions in which the work was done. This does not even factor in the delay between submission through to publication. In this case, decisions were being made with information not available – and in this case, contradictory – to information available at the time the actual work was done.

Although it may be possible to dismiss the above as simply a changing of metrics, this is not so. Even within a single ranking system value can shift. For example, *International Journal of Leadership in Education* shifted in the ERA list from an “A” to a “B.” Additionally, within SCIMago, it has moved from a quartile one (2009) through to a second quartile (2010, 2011, 2013) and even a quartile three (2012, 2014). The issue of stability is much larger than simply across or within ranking systems.

Overcoming this issue requires recognition that decisions are made with the information available at the time. This means that it is not appropriate to overlay upon the past information that was not available at the time. A key role for administration becomes ensuring that faculty have the latest and most appropriate information to make decisions. In the example of this chapter, the latter was to some extent addressed through the provision of a list of “quality” outlets – although this did come after the research workload assessment exercise. The difficulties remain around timing, both with the delivery of information post event, and the historical mapping. Providing faculty with a list of where to publish – or at least, where to publish if you want to be recognized with workload allocation and resourcing – potentially addresses the publishing in poor outlets issue (mindful of the above caveats of shifts in value). Consistent across this section and the previous two is a matter of clarity, a coherent and well-articulated position of what is desired.

*Beyond Binaries*

An underlying generative principle of the process outlined in this case was that not all research is of equal value. This is a well-rehearsed argument, but decisions classifying work as, and as not, “quality” are not particularly helpful. The absence of a gradient in outcomes results in binary thinking that serves the classifier more so than reflects any version of reality. Claims that rely on journal rankings as proxies for individual article “quality” further conflate matters. What it does is reduce the work of universities to one end – improving rankings. As highlighted in the previous section, to focus all institutional efforts on a narrow band of metrics means that should the criteria change so too could performance judgments.

The reduction, or redistribution, of research workload on the basis of binary thinking created an explicit class-based system among faculty. Resources and supports were limited to the “quality” researchers while the poor “quality” or inactive researchers focused on teaching and administration. The classification of faculty in this initial research workload assessment is inscribed in that employee’s profile. Although it is quite possible that the research-intensive faculty may not produce enough “quality” work to retain their status, the teaching-intensive faculty have little opportunity to generate the type of work that will increase their share of research workload. As this continues to play out, it has the potential to be a major factor in recruitment (or loss) of faculty.

In an era where flatter hierarchies are the orthodoxy of educational administration discourses (Waite, 2010), it is unusual to see an organization explicitly adopt a system that facilitates class-based divisions. It is naïve to assume that judgments and resourcing decisions are not needed for the ongoing administration of universities. The difficulty raised in the example of this chapter is the leap to the binary of what is and is not “quality.” The absence of a sliding scale means enduring decisions on the contribution of faculty to institutional performance have been made based on what is effectively a single data point. Faculty either fit the criteria or they do not. The politics of fit has not frequently been discussed in educational administration (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2010) and in this particular case, when combined with the criteria of fit being hidden from faculty there are serious issues for the institution. Moving beyond binary thinking is a requirement of moving into a productive space for working with faculty.

*Productive Theorizing*

A key goal of this chapter has been to not simply replace one meta-narrative of “quality” with another. Instead, I have sought to provide viable alternatives based on an over-arching pursuit of “quality.” To base an institution’s research strategy on a particular set of metrics is risky. Dismissing research that does not meet the brief is based on a belief in the stability and enduring qualities of the contemporary metrics. The examples showing the shifts in rankings for *JEA* and *IJLE* (which are two of many) are evidence of the dynamism of rankings and the potentially flawed thinking of basing institutional strategy on a narrow set of metrics.

There is however little doubt that the institution needed to make changes to remain competitive in the national, and international, research sector. Two matters warrant particular attention for the purpose of productively engaging with the problem: (i) the matter of timing and (ii) assumptions of faculty.

The rhetoric adopted by administration is intimately linked to the performance of institutions. With shifts in funding models and the potentially huge implications for the institution, the DVC-R was right to stress a sense of urgency in improving research outputs. He sought to implement a rational plan for raising performance from his arrival onwards. Rationality is a common approach when performance is declining – even if just in relative terms. The logic of systematic change is a persuasive argument and difficult to refute. The timing of intentions and information is however vitally important in such an approach. As the example has shown, the criteria used to establish data and interventions were not made explicit prior to actions. It is possible that decisions were already made based on prior data (e.g., low ERA performance) and a set of assumptions that faculty were poor “quality” researchers. The possibility that the institution’s past ERA performance may have been the product of their approach to the submission seems to have been overlooked which is intriguing given the arrival of the DVC-R so late in the preparation for ERA 2015 (that which is almost entirely relied on his manipulation or representation of performance data over the collection period). The timing of information and reforms is demonstrative of some underlying assumptions of faculty.

What was missing in the DVC-R’s approach was an appeal to the social and emotional needs of employees. Rather than productively engaging with faculty he brought a critical opinion of existing faculty. This was most obvious in the recruitment of researchers and research teams (often poached from other institutions just before the ERA deadline for eligibility)

into research-only positions and the need for existing faculty to cover teaching loads. In basing his strategy on a rational plan there was no appeal to the normative of how things could be, rather just the need to reform. The opportunity for faculty to improve performance based on an explicit set of “quality” criteria was not provided. It was assumed that they were poor performers, unable of contributing positively to building the institution. Reinforced through the class-based structure the sense of hope was lost for many on faculty.

### Summary

The case presented in this chapter sought to highlight undesirable actions undertaken in the pursuit of improving institutional performance. Central issues identified include the establishment of a set of criteria for “quality”; not making this criteria available to faculty; judging faculty based on the hidden criteria; and then making a number of assumptions regarding the “quality” of faculty. In addressing these matters I propose (i) making the relations between the DVC-R and the object (research “quality”) clear; (ii) facilitating dialogue and debate (within parameters) around what is a “quality” scholarly output and the evidence needed to justify such a claim; (iii) locating and recognizing, the work of faculty in time and space (this does the work around parameters – both contemporary and historical); (iv) removing binary labels such as “quality” and poor “quality”; and (v) productively engaging with staff – giving a sense of support (even intervention/remediation) rather than punitive sanctions.

## CONCLUSION

Consistent with the theme of this book, the dark side of leadership, I have sought to trouble the widely held belief that performance outcomes and leadership are intimately connected. Problematizing the attribution of leadership is however a well-rehearsed argument. So too are critiques of great man theories of (turnaround) leadership (e.g., Eacott, 2013). Significantly, my contention is that the intellectual resources of educational administration have failed to adequately grapple with the complexities of practice in a manner that goes beyond replacing one pre-existing normative orientation with another. To overcome these limitations I have provided an alternate lens for thinking through organizing activity. The *relational* approach I have mobilized brings the pre-existing normative orientation to

the fore where it can be engaged with in the interests of advancing practice. Importantly, it enables dialogue and debate about the underlying generative principles of decisions/actions rather than superficially rejecting alternatives because they are different to your own.

Any claim of success by the DVC-R is problematic. How much can actually be claimed to have changed in the institution on the basis of his actions? Any leap from the correlation (his arrival and improved performance) to causation is premature. How much can actually be claimed to have changed, and how much is simply moving the pieces to produce a more persuasive ERA submission. This represents a significant challenge to the rhetoric of educational administration literatures. The reduction of organizations to externally measure performance – a highly functional account of organizing activity – obscures the political work of organizing. Increases in performance, those that are almost universally applauded in organizations are not necessarily always the result of desirable action. In many ways, the case study displays the orthodoxy of educational leadership – having a vision, a plan to bring that vision into being, and monitoring and accountability measures. However, the implementation where the criteria remains hidden from faculty, the plan creating a class-based social structure within the organization and accountability measures further legitimizing the class-based structure led to considerable unrest and disenfranchised faculty. These outcomes are rarely reported as the result of leadership and reflect a dark side of improving performance.

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