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### Leading higher education professionals: local, connected, and artful

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## Leading higher education professionals: local, connected, and artful

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In this paper, we explore the work life of a scholar new to academia in her methods of leading informally. We discuss five vignettes that offer moments of learning and reflection, including reducing performance anxiety, privileging financial accountability, the rise of the virtual world, the impact of silence, and the potential for confrontation to strengthen working relationships. We offer suggestions as to how contemporary leaders may adapt to the freedom that artful action offers.

**Keywords:** bureaucracy; corporatisation; embodiment; leadership; mentoring; relationships

### Introduction

In this paper, we explore the effectiveness of informal leadership in a tertiary education setting. We track the behaviours of a junior lecturer as she seeks to exercise legitimate power within her institution. Although new to the Academy, Bridgette Thomas (a pseudonym) has worked in industry for a number of years learning her leadership craft informally as well as by holding recognised leadership positions.

We first came in contact with Bridgette at a local conference and because we had shared similar practitioner backgrounds, we decided to meet regularly to talk over common issues with which we all were grappling. Although our meetings began with us acting as mentors, they soon morphed into occasions for personal sharing and mutual support. As we attended to Bridgette's story, we became alert to the systemic issues and the deeply ingrained cultural values that militate against flexibility and innovation within tertiary educational environments.

Bridgette recounted stories that showed she considered her institution to be over bureaucratic and somewhat clumsy in its ability to respond to local challenges and needs. In response, she decided that she would set about creating networks with scholars regardless of their positions in her institution, declaring that 'leadership is about place and space'. This mantra became for her a way of connecting with other people within her locale and of creating an artful workplace that not only resisted the dampening effects of policy-driven systems, but that also enlivened the environment within which she worked.

In this paper, we explore the tactics and strategies that Bridgette deployed in order to create a vibrant environment with her colleagues. Her ideas, as we observed her, were that she focused on the intrinsic value of her relationships, her playfulness in these relationships, and the ways in which she energised what other people brought both to formal meetings and chance conversations. All this, we summarise with her refrain, 'Be where you are and connect with the people who are around you'.

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By focusing on local connections, we discuss how leaders within the tertiary educational environment might learn to respond to transformative ‘moments’. This necessarily involves slowing down the pace of work and taking time to respond to others as they struggle with *their* purpose in the institution. Thus from Bridgette’s story we offer a view of leadership education that is counter-intuitive. Our claim is that by resisting the urge to perform perfunctory goals and instead by taking time to engage relationally, leadership may be more effective.

The paper is structured by narrating five events which serve to illustrate the local, connected, and artful practice of Bridgette’s leadership at work. We also discuss various responses from the institution’s senior leadership, in particular the kinds of responses Bridgette received to innovative suggestions (often silence), the ways in which senior leaders resisted prompts by privileging financial monitoring over embracing new potentials, and how both Bridgette and the organisation created facades. We explore the ways in which Bridgette sought to informally educate her senior leaders through her responses and subsequent actions.

Beyond these narratives, we discuss Bridgette’s relationships with her direct reports, and tease out some of the relational dynamics that offer the potential for transformative moments.

### Attending to moments

As we have observed Bridgette and her university career, we have seen her struggle with particular issues. We define these as ‘moments’ which have prompted her to consider appropriate responses. She has not always successfully negotiated these moments, but they have offered her learning opportunities which have helped her refine the way that she operates within her institution.

For Bridgette, these moments have been akin to the process of aesthetic engagement where she has pushed out her horizons to meet those of her institution. Underpinning her desire was the existential question posed by Foucault (1991), who asked: ‘Couldn’t everyone’s *life* become a work of art?’ (p. 350, emphasis added). She asked that if life itself is to be lived artfully, how this notion could be extended beyond the individual to the corporate. Thus she concurred with Willis’s (2000) question: ‘What happens if we understand the raw materials of everyday lived *cultures* as if they were living art forms?’ (p. ix, emphasis added). Bridgette’s life as an academic, then, was primarily artful in that she interacted within her context as would an artist with her materials, sensing the constraints of the media and experimenting with possible solutions to the limitations imposed by the materials. Her artistic processes, she believed, would provide the tools for social action leading to revitalisation within her organisation.

These lofty goals were not daunting to Bridgette, however. She found ways of distilling her vision into daily interactions with her organisation, for ‘at such a moments [of interaction] we enter the alien world of the artefact, but at the same time gather it into our own realm, reaching a more complete understanding of ourselves’ (Eagleton, 1996, p. 62). For Bridgette, the university context *was* the artefact and moments of dissonance and resistance offered her learning possibilities, opportunities for growth and development without necessarily provoking institutional change. She realised early on that impatience for structural change can be counter-productive, and that large-scale change often only occurs in times of revolution. Usually ‘the forces for *conservation* and the forces for *innovation* play out a sharp drama in all total social phenomena’ (Gurvitch, 1964, p. 3, emphases added) and these countervailing forces are always already present. In our

conversations together we agreed that taking opportunities for personal development would inevitably impact on the social environment at the institution, and that in the process she could model different ways of being appropriate to its innovative and creative goals.

Attending to moments, however, is not just about understanding the either–or binary of innovation and conservation. Rather, these phenomena are continually present and informing each other. What is required is to see conservation *within* innovation and vice versa, thus ‘they are at rest the one against the other, coextensive with one another’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 54–55) and requires being aware of all the contributing elements that comprise them, observing how they ‘accumulate energy’ (Dewey, 1934, p. 161). For leaders, this necessitates acknowledging the sometimes contradictory feelings and responses and of being ‘affectively held [and] drawn into the world’ (Fielding, 2011, p. 529). As Ladkin (2010) writes:

leadership cannot exist apart from the particular individuals who are engaged and involved in any leadership dynamic. Leadership does not exist without people who are in some way identified as ‘leaders’ or people who are identified as people who they will lead. Neither can it exist outside of a particular community or organizational culture or history. For these reasons I argue that rather than being a ‘whole’, leadership can best be described as a ‘moment’ of social relations. (p. 26)

As we worked with Bridgette’s stories in conversation, we encouraged her to adopt a reflective stance, a posture that would provide a means for her to step back from her immediate concerns and to observe herself within her context. To do so, we drew on Schön’s (1983) ideas of the reflective practitioner and in particular his claim that, ‘even when [professionals make] conscious use of research-based theories and techniques, [they are] dependent on tacit recognitions, judgments, and skilful performances’ (p. 50) (see also Davis & Moon, 2013). We were particularly interested to help Bridgette find a way to explore her implicitly understood ideas and her evaluations of those, as well as finding ways of enacting them artfully. Necessarily this involved taking a critical approach to her own encounters and finding ways to discern where she was being intransigent, as well as understanding the power relations that were at work within her daily context (Thompson & Thompson, 2008).

Usually our conversations were free-flowing and avoided offering prescriptive solutions to the dilemmas that Bridgette presented. We also avoided taking an omniscient, expert advice-giving approach and adopted a collaborative way of sharing our mutual experiences in order to know more clearly the encountered problems. We did not seek to find ways of resolving any of the issues but rather sought to know, understand, and, where possible, hold tensions without the need to arrive at actionable resolutions (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 568).

We maintained a log of meetings that occurred over the 4 years of our relationship. This was not a field journal or diary as such, but a file with some key prompts; short summaries of salient issues in our conversations. In order to turn our mentoring relationship into this research paper, we returned to the log and focused on repetitive themes that emerged over our meetings. We then selected five vignettes that were the most illustrative of the recurring ideas, and as authors discussed together their potential to represent both the actual episodes which we had worked through with Bridgette, and then possible strategies of dealing with them should they arise in the future (which, they did in many cases).

We analysed each of the vignettes following a narrative process, identifying the key actors in each story, and how Bridgette and we as mentors were characterising them (Barry, 1997; Drewery & Winslade, 1997). Within each narrative, we considered the tacit assumptions to which Bridgette worked and her initial judgements vis-à-vis her characterisations. Having noted these framing devices, we then returned to each vignette to offer a commentary on her reflexive responses and then applied a critical perspective to these responses. In each case, we identified the nature of the problem on which Bridgette focused and then enquired into her relationship with that problem. This enabled us to keep a separation from the particular disclosures that she made and the more generic issues represented by the problems (Winslade & Cotter, 1997).

With this as a backdrop, we turn to the vignettes that explore Bridgette's academic community and the ways in which she attended to moments as they occurred.

### Reducing performance anxiety

One of the issues that Bridgette became aware of early on in her academic career was that of reputation management. The ways in which the University branded itself as a hotbed of innovation seemed at odds with external public perceptions as well as with the internal staff understandings of the University. A chance conversation with a former colleague alerted her to the mismatch when her friend said, 'I hear things are not all well at your university'. The colleague was referring to a rumour that morale was very low, and in spite of attempts by the University's leaders to promote a positive face to the community, word had got out that staff were disgruntled.

A crowded educational market place can result in those in positions of formal authority becoming anxious and determined to retain and increase market share. Bridgette began to sense that efforts to sell the University's services locally and internationally meant that some of the claims that the leaders made of itself lacked authenticity in terms of its core identity.

This issue raises the question: Who creates the vision of the enterprise and who is charged with promoting that vision? Ladkin, in her analysis of the leadership during the crisis provoked by Hurricane Katrina in September 2005, claims that what was required was not a vision for future actions but rather a sense of knowing the present in all its paradoxes; 'the entire scenario and its attendant intricacies and complexities. Rather than the skill of looking forward, the situation called for the capacity to deeply perceive what was going on in the here and now' (Ladkin, 2010, p. 50).

Leadership in a tertiary institution is a complex phenomenon that requires working with highly skilled people who are specialised in specific areas of competence. Scholars often express loyalty first to their academic discipline and second to their employing institution. In this regard, scholars are not easily led and express cynicism and disdain for marketing strategies that do not reflect the conversations in classrooms and staff rooms that critique modern management practices. Thus the disconnection between current scholarship and outmoded administration practices within her institution became a cause of considerable angst for Bridgette. She wondered why marketing strategies and vision statements were imposed from outside of the rigours of academic discourse, agreeing with Heifetz and Laurie (1997) that the vision needs to come from those working within the institution and reflect the identity of that institution:

The prevailing notion that leadership consists of having a vision and aligning people with that vision is bankrupt because it continues to treat adaptive situations as if they were technical:

the authority figure is supposed to divine where the company is going, and people are supposed to follow. Leadership is reduced to a combination of grand knowing and salesmanship. (p. 134)

Bridgette discovered that when offered innovative solutions to the decline in morale, leaders became even more conservative, and instead of focusing on points of difference and uniqueness, the University was more intent on demonstrating how much alike it was to other tertiary institutions. A sense of anxiety about the institution's place in the academic world took precedence over the confident assertion of skills and competencies inherent within the organisation. In taking this approach, financial responsibility became the marker of successful leadership rather than encouraging new ideas and their development.

Bridgette's tacit understanding was that the organisation would value her insights, having experienced ways of dealing with this kind of disjuncture in past jobs. However, she found it difficult to appreciate as a newcomer to the academic world, that bureaucratic functions can limit individual agency. How would she hold her lack of power while at the same time influence the marketing of the university's mission so that it was more authentic?

The problem here is that Bridgette found herself in an oppositional situation. Schön (1983) calls this a 'win/lose' problem when neither side is willing or able to understand the other. He notes from an example of a research and development company preparing a new product and the problems between the developers who want to preserve the integrity of their design and managers who want to keep profit streams active, thereby compromising the product:

Each seeks to gain unilateral control over the situation, to win and avoid losing in a situation he perceives as irretrievably win/lose. And each one withholds negative information from the other, as long as he believes it is a winning strategy to do so. (p. 264)

Our discussions revolved around notions of withholding information for self-protection, and revealing negative information at the risk of jeopardising her career. We did not seek to forge a definitive proposition but rather to simply get Bridgette to *know* the problem in all its facets.

### **Financial accountability or professional development**

Organisations are rational places where plans, policies, and procedures are refined over time in order to ensure the smooth running of the operation. The problem that rationality imposes on organisations is the potential for inflexibility in dealing with ideas that emerge, but fall outside of the annual plan.

In taking an artful approach to leadership, Bridgette believes that improvisation is an apt companion to established traditions and forms. Improvisation provides the context for co-creative leadership to occur. This requires that those in leadership positions let go of control and allow for emergence and development. Gagnon, Vough, and Nickerson (2012) use the term 'affiliative leadership' to describe ways in which relationships are strengthened through developing trust and 'being in the moment' (p. 306). This implies an active and vibrant environment where offers are given and received.

For improvisation to succeed alongside formal structures, leaders are called on to affirm ideas and take the risk (financially) that those ideas might imply. Saying 'yes' opens the possibility for something more to occur than is currently known. As Thomson

(2003) declares, ‘those who say “Yes” are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say ‘No’ are rewarded by the safety they attain’ (p. 122).

The invocation of the binary either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is deliberate because it reflects challenges that Bridgette faced in initiating a programme involving leadership development workshops held off-site. When she announced that she would like to run a 3-day workshop, and had been able to secure facilities at minimal cost, initial responses from financial managers were ambivalent. She was asked, ‘how do you know that they work?’ And she was requested to gather data from people who had attended such events in other places to demonstrate the efficacy of concentrated leadership workshops.

In our conversations, we agreed with Bridgette that this was a reasonable request: monies in public institutions need to be spent wisely. However, she felt that her initiative had been squashed by the request to provide quantifiable evidence beforehand. She believed that a simple ‘yes, and make sure you collect evidence for its effectiveness’ would have demonstrated that her managers trusted her and were willing to rely on her professional judgement to organise and run the workshop while at the same time attending to the requirements to work within a constrained financial environment. The rebuff that she experienced had the effect of dampening her initiative and restrained the possibility of innovation and improvisation.

Although the incident described above is minor, it serves to illustrate a broader tendency of those in formal leadership positions to select first, and then call for variety to be created. Particularly in times of budget pressures, selection is predominantly based on financial considerations. According to Shirky (2008), however, innovative and creative organisations allow for variety and diversity to be created first, and only then is it time to employ various means to select the best idea. Thus, Bridgette’s organisation’s practice ran counter to the creative and innovative image to which it aspired.

The University’s goal of enacting innovation became centred on the expansion of its virtual presence, thereby ensuring uniformity across all its activities. This raised a problem for Bridgette in her desire to be local and connected, meaning she had to deal directly with the relationship between virtual and actual systems of management and education delivery.

To support an innovative climate, Amabile, Schatzela, Monetaa, and Kramer (2004) note that managers need to display ‘an openness to and appreciation of subordinates’ ideas, empathy for subordinates’ feelings (including their need for recognition), and facility for using interpersonal networks to both give and receive information relevant to the project’ (p. 30). This raises the question of the body itself in relation to the virtual self. Indeed, Crossley (2006) argues that we only know ourselves in relation to other bodies in situ. Thus the problem for Bridgette was to find ways of networking with key personnel within her environment physically, and then to establish a virtual presence that would expand her networks beyond her embodied self. In so doing, casual conversations within the ‘hallways’ (Dixon, 1997) could morph into distance, or ‘glocal’ conversations (Strati, 2002) while still retaining their artful intent of being present *to* and *with* her colleagues.

### A virtual world

In order to continue her innovating activities and initiatives, Bridgette found herself increasingly obliged to create virtual realities that served to comply with bureaucratic requirements. As her university continued to expand its virtual footprint, she became more focused on her embodied self in her daily relationships with her colleagues and students.

This contradictory movement of situating herself in her embodied local world came about as a result of our discussions on the nature and importance of gesture. Although virtual means of communication and delivering education have come on the back of the growth of social media and the democratisation of organisations as a result (see for example Shirky, 2008), she became persuaded that ‘meaningful material interaction is achieved by a blend of perception – reading the signs of the material world – and gesture – intentional action in and on that material world that changes it and its meaning’ (Dant, 2008, p. 19).

Hand-in-hand with the rise of the virtual environment is also the increasing homogenisation of the tertiary education system with business schools complying with the standards of faceless international accrediting agencies. A request for evidence that such accreditation brought benefits received the baffling response by the Dean that no such evidence existed, and that she had asked the same question at her previous institution, where also no evidence was available. Unfortunately, accreditation was not just expensive but had additional negative effects. Bridgette was determined to continue to innovate in her classrooms but found she was often stymied by additional layers of learning outcomes where students were assessed on competencies of which they had no knowledge. Thus individual scores for each student were assigned to particular learning outcomes even though the students were not actually aware that they were being assessed on these aspects.

On the other hand, *virtual shields* were put up by Bridgette in order to be able to continue her innovating and initiating role. Particularly with regard to teaching, the University had set a wide range and number of required parameters, such as textbooks, prescribed learning objectives and goals, and predetermined percentages and types of assignments. Like many of her colleagues, in order to continue to innovate, Bridgette constructed outward fronts of what her courses officially looked like so she could satisfy institutional requirements, and then described to the students in the first two weeks of course that there would be significant differences in reality.

These virtual layers allowed for *rogue innovation* to take place – experiments in new approaches and methodologies that can be introduced and tried, further tweaked, amended, or even discarded, before starting the road to bureaucratic legitimacy. Unfortunately, the virtual character of many aspects of Bridgette’s work also meant that certain top-down actions could strike completely unexpectedly and without knowledge of its actual effects. For example, one of Bridgette’s most innovative courses was suddenly removed from the raft of offerings. However, the actual content and method were qualitatively altogether different from what the University thought it was removing. In this instance, she was unable to realise her ambition to close the innovative circle. She had not communicated in a timely manner to her leaders, that she made the significant changes and that by doing so she had improved the curriculum, as she expected that such openness would lead to the termination of her initiatives.

The important learning for Bridgette was that while she valued embodied leadership as a philosophical position, she needed to turn her attention to how she would enact this authentically, so that her colleagues would trust her motivations. This required her to assent to the leader–follower dialectic and behave with authenticity and trustworthiness as both a leader *and* follower. To this end, she needed to close the innovation loop within herself first. For, although Avolio and Gardner (2005) locate authenticity into separate domains of leaders and followers, arguing that:



increased self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling, authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in followers. In turn, followers' authenticity contributes to their well-being and the attainment of sustainable and veritable performance. (p. 317)

We encouraged Bridgette to embody authentic engagement while at the same time seeking counsel from colleagues as to how she might perform more effectively. Her aesthetic, sensate responses became then the raw material for her to evaluate the relative importance of any innovation that she brought into her role. Notwithstanding that her difficulty with the pace of her development, vis-à-vis the bureaucracy's ability to cope with more rapid change, Bridgette expressed confidence that she was learning how to situate herself within the confines of the systems that constrained her.

### **Being met with silence**

As the University increasingly emphasised the theme of innovation in its branding and marketing outlets, Bridgette decided to help her organisation by proactively voicing ideas for new or improved practices. In her previous work in industry, she had learned to share her ideas, to brainstorm them with groups of colleagues and then to, through a process of assessment, discard some and realise others. Her experience was that when colleagues and leaders were secure in themselves, they were better able to let go of control and allow this process of dialogue and creative design to occur.

Although espousing innovation as important and necessary to foster developments appropriate to the twenty-first century, she noted that her University suffered from significant bloat (Greene, Kisida, & Mills, 2010), where layers of managers and administrators vetted and then sabotaged some of her ideas. She became curious about the ways in which the organisation dealt with proposals and over the course of a year she decided to track all her initiatives in a spreadsheet. In particular she noted the proposed initiation, the forum where her idea was floated (such as an email, a committee meeting she attended, or a formal conversation with one of her senior colleagues), the initial response to her idea, and the kind of action that was taken eventually.

At the end of the year, she reviewed her spreadsheet and saw that she took 32 of those initiatives. Her records indicated that her ideas were adopted in the two cases and in many instances (11) she merely received some form of acknowledgement (for instance, an email saying that her idea would be considered). However, in the majority of cases (19), she did not receive any acknowledgement, in spite of her ideas being readily implementable. For example, since the University had hired two people who spent their entire time drafting and revising policies, all staff regularly received emails notifying them that various policies had been updated. She suggested that rather than staff having to read the new policy, retrieve the old policy, and compare them to find out what had changed, these emails could contain brief outlines of the most important modifications. This request received an acknowledgement.

The feedback she received was thus very limited. However, when probing a little further into some of the reasons for the silence, she discovered that her initiatives were seen as intruding on another authority of some sort (a committee, taskforce or person who had been given a designated role). She began to recognise that she was operating in domains where she had no formal legitimacy. Managers would be quick to point her in the direction of another committee or ginger group, allowing them to distance themselves from the issue at hand while at the same time pointing out how these committees represented a high degree of staff autonomy. Unfortunately, when Bridgette would then

approach these committees, she was typically met with the same silence or perfunctory acknowledgement.

Faced with such mute responses, Bridgette increasingly took to limiting her focus on projects and initiatives for which she needed little or no organisational resources, and constructed virtual fronts (see the previous section) in order to protect her endeavours. These tactics enabled Bridgette to create space both within and outside of the seemingly closed structures, where instead of pushing up against an institutional wall, she created cracks inside the wall within which she could operate. For, as Hjorth (2004) argues, 'such inventions are created in the crack of the surveillance of the proprietary powers [and] creates surprises in them' (p. 420).

On reflection, Bridgette had to admit to herself that she had been poorly able to adjust to the slow pace and the convoluted structure of committees, workgroups, and departments. She had been ineffective at 'playing' the system. She observed that others had been better able than her to get things done. Still others were better able than her to endure the slowness, complexity and inertia that grassroots initiatives commonly met. So both in terms of patience and in terms of effectiveness she felt that she had fallen short. By taking actions that were within her own field of influence, Bridgette was able to circumvent the obfuscation that she continually encountered and made small but significant gains in helping her University become more entrepreneurial and innovative, especially in her research outputs, which were well received in the international arena, and in her classroom activities that enabled students to encounter first-hand innovative pedagogical approaches. However, she became increasingly wary of the silence from her senior managers and decided to take a more direct approach.

### **Seeking confrontation**

Although vocal in expressing her ideas for improvement, Bridgette remained courteous and polite when encountering silence or indifference, and avoided any direct confrontation with the organisation, instead sidestepping potential altercations by means of her use of virtual fronts. However, in one instance she directly criticised members of her leadership team, claiming that they had breached accepted rules of decorum (Li, 2005).

Bridgette had organised a symposium on a particular research topic, as this was a direction that her school had a professed desire in which to excel, and which also aligned with the University's efforts to position itself as a centre of innovation. The symposium was broadcast beyond the campus locale, with other interested leaders invited to attend virtually by way of video conferencing. After the internationally renowned guest speaker presented, a group discussion took place about the various methodological issues that researchers in this domain confronted.

During the discussion, some of the leaders charged with operationalising the ideas that had been presented appeared distracted. Bridgette needed to make a decision: whether to note in public that some people were using their mobile phones assuming that they were out of shot and not being watched, or to discuss the matter privately with the leaders concerned. One of her challenges of being artful has been to learn to focus on her senses and stay with what she was feeling (Springborg, 2010).

In the interim some of the other leaders left the session and other attendees followed suit leaving a smaller group to discuss the ideas. Staying with her senses, she felt she needed to speak her concerns in that moment. When she began wrapping up the session, she expressed her uncertainty as to whether leaders were committed to pursuing this change, given their physical and apparent mental absence.

The next day her direct manager stormed into her office, angrily declaring that her comments had been embarrassing and accused Bridgette of being unprofessional in drawing the guest speaker into an internal conflict. Again, in staying with her senses, Bridgette acknowledged that yes she on reflection, she should have made her comments in private later, and specifically to the individuals themselves. By pointing out a lack of decorum she had inadvertently shown she lacked in decorum herself by highlighting the leaders' inappropriate behaviour publically.

This was a salient lesson to Bridgette and the leadership team with whom she works. Although the issue of public and private behaviours was the presenting issue, the direct confrontation had a positive, refreshing effect on the relationship between Bridgette and her manager. Instead of hiding behind silent bureaucratic layers, her manager had revealed her own emotional state and in turn apologised for her own actions. By both acknowledging that they could have handled the situation more productively they were able to put their relationship on a more positive footing. She felt that their relationship had a much more human, present and artful feel to it, than the previous bureaucratic walls that she had been facing and that she had indeed managed to learn *and* offer a different way of doing leadership.

## Discussion

In our explorations of Bridgette Thomas's journey in learning and exercising leadership within a tertiary educational environment, we have focused on five examples which encapsulate some of the issues that we shared together in our mentoring sessions. We discovered that underpinning her quest for authenticity within her new world of work there was a desire to lead and respond artfully. She had already experienced the stressors that leadership positions impose on people, earlier in her working life, and she had no desire to seek to replicate these former ambitions in this context. Learning to lead informally and artfully from within her circle of influence was her primary goal. Artful leadership, however, is complex and difficult, especially when others within the enterprise may not value the same intentions. Bridgette's efforts were ultimately unsuccessful in the majority of cases. Still, we feel that university managers may learn from her flaws and stumblings.

Accompanying the artful leadership agenda is a desire to attend to the feelings that underpin responses. To this end, Taylor (2013) encourages leaders to take notice of their moment-by-moment sensations in order to become more attuned to the potential for beautiful actions. Ladkin (2008) concurs, claiming that in part, beauty within an organisational context results from the interplay between form and content. In the illustrations we have explored of Bridgette's working life, it seems to us that form often takes precedence over content and that the desire for innovation is often thwarted by the inability of leaders attend to artful moments that may provoke change and development.

The dynamic interplay between form *and* content has become obstructed by the increasing corporatisation of the tertiary education system, making it even more difficult to lead artfully. According to Hil (2012), higher education systems are marked by 'marketisation, increasing amounts of bureaucracy and needless regulation' (p. 22); factors which actively work against the sector's core function of open intellectual inquiry and where the form of regulation and policy development becomes the sole arbiter of success, minimising the power of content to provoke change.

Many of these problems became evident as we followed Bridgette in her attempts to take grassroots initiatives. The strong focus on financial returns and on reputation (for

innovation) is unfortunately not accompanied by an efficient and effective organisation that allows for flexibility and variety. On the contrary, academic bloat has seen layers of administrators and managers being added to the University, in Bridgette's institution reducing the ratio of research active academics to 2:5, in other words for every 2 academics there are 5 non-academic staff. Yet there has been little evidence of efficiency gains resulting from this growth in the bureaucracy. If anything, scholars like Bridgette complain of having less time for research and of being encumbered by seemingly meaningless tasks to satisfy the requirements of faceless accrediting agencies.

Corporatisation has seen an increase in standardisation and a difficulty to allow for space for innovation outside of organisational constraints. Typically, the corporatised university prefers to select first, and then create variety, rather than trusting staff to create variety, which can then subsequently be selected, so that new initiatives can be repeated again and refined. Lengthy approval procedures, the construction of virtual administrations, and leaders distancing themselves from the daily work of the institution all lead to a dampening of initiatives.

How, then, could tertiary educational providers become more alive to creative change moments and be sensitised to the needs of the local environment? We think that in the first instance, leaders must become acutely aware of the deleterious effects of silence and inaction. The failure to respond even provisionally to a suggestion has the effect of creating doubt and mistrust (Cramton, 2001), and at its worst, silence may in and of itself be construed as a violent act (Žižek, 2008).

We are not suggesting that all ideas have equal merit. However, for an innovation to be tried and adopted, leaders must learn to develop trusting relationships with colleagues. Our work with Bridgette is ongoing and we have advised her to stay connected with her colleagues, even though she has expressed frustration at the perfunctory responses of her leaders. They seem to her to be shut away in their offices and meeting rooms, but we have encouraged her to continue with her local, artful initiatives.

We think that leaders would do well to spend less time in their offices and the engage with staff in the corridors (Dixon, 1997), where informality breaks down hierarchy and power differentials. Further, we think that leaders could experiment with the simple yet profound response of saying, 'yes, and...' rather than 'no, because...' and discover the freedom of enabling staff to try new initiatives.

Cultures of innovation develop and grow because the behaviours associated with this culture are expected, practiced, and reinforced throughout the organisation (Schein, 2010; Tellis, Prabhu, & Chandy, 2009). Unfortunately, at Bridgette's institution the leadership development programme was not focused on organisational creativity and innovation. In spite of the espoused importance of innovation, leadership development courses centred on planning and control. As leaders seek training and experience into the ways in which they may encourage new forms of practice within their institutions, they may begin to see the variety and creativity for which they crave.

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