

## The Legitimacy Crisis at UWA and Two Syndromes to Avoid: a submission on 'Renewal' etc

1. It is evident from the information meetings about the Renewal process and from UWA ASA and NTEU meetings about the process that there is a *legitimacy crisis* at UWA, which the Executive may perceive dimly or without clarity about its scope.
2. This statement may be dismissed as an opinion rather than a fact but there is one way of verifying which it is. The reality could be ascertained readily if the Executive uses online technology (which it has promoted in the teaching environment) to find out the *extent of support amongst UWA staff for the Renewal proposals*. All that is needed is for an online and anonymous *referendum* on the proposals to be held. The details of the question would need to be worked out cooperatively with UWA ASA for the referendum itself to have legitimacy. The results of the referendum would need to be reported to staff immediately, as for any credible democratic process.
3. Should there be 50% or above support for the proposals the Executive would be in a stronger position to proceed with any major restructuring. Should there be limited support, such as 25-49%, the Executive should treat this as a warning or orange light that signifies substantial changes are needed to the proposals for them to attain any legitimacy. Should the support be under 25% this would be a sign that the process has faltered or failed for various reasons (e.g. the unwise December announcement) and would need to begin anew, in order to have any hope of gaining legitimacy.
4. A decision by the Executive to refuse such a simple, democratic use of contemporary online technology to test the reality of support for the proposals, as promoted so far, would constitute *prima facie* evidence of the existence of a legitimacy crisis at UWA.
5. In the event that the Executive refuses to test the extent of support for the proposals among UWA staff, and proceeds regardless of any credible and scientific knowledge about the current state of this support, there are at least two primary syndromes of administrative and political failure that it should attempt to avoid (other syndromes of failure exist, but these are highlighted for their primary relevance at this time).
6. The first syndrome could be called *Rushed Restructuring*. It might be illustrated with various examples. For reasons of space, one will suffice. Khrushchev as leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union attempted two major restructurings, one in 1957 with the replacement of industrial ministries by regional economic councils, and a second in 1962 with the bifurcation of the state's administrative command apparatus into industrial and agricultural branches, creating national fragmentation. Both restructurings were reversed soon after Khrushchev was deposed. UWA has had one major restructuring, the 2012 New Course structure, which in the opinion of many staff was a failure, at least in the way it was implemented, if not in conception.
7. While the relevance of the analogy may be questioned, the lesson is clear: *don't rush into a major restructuring without substantial consideration, and sufficient support from those required to implement it, who will be expected to increase productivity while implementing major administrative changes, the viability of which is doubtful.*

8. Before dismissing that analogy, consider that there are three types of organisations (considered as Weberian ideal-types) in terms of the basic operating procedures, namely profit-making corporations surviving in a market, democratic organisations, and administrative-command organisations based on hierarchy but not operating according to profit-making principles. Although UWA operates in a social context in which market forces dominate, it is not internally administered according to market forces, so in terms of decision-making it is closer to the administrative-command type of organisation than to a private corporation. The Khrushchevian example is just one analogy. There are others from other situations where administrative-command types of organisation exist, but the basic lesson in point 7 above covers all situations.
9. The second syndrome could be called the *Hubris of Power*, where decision-makers engage in grave mistakes because they overestimate the value of what the historical sociologist Michael Mann called *despotic power*, in contrast to *infrastructural power*. The former relies on force to ensure change and can have catastrophic results. The latter requires cooperation from subordinates to create change, and consequently necessitates a much more complex process of planning and consideration, in order that the unforeseen consequences of particular changes are placed in perspective.
10. Examples of the hubris of power are numerous. Arguably one of the biggest blunders fitting this category in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which occurred because those in power in the US and the UK did what they could using war as the ultimate form of despotic power, regardless of predictable consequences for Iraq, for the Middle East and for the United Nations. There are many lessons from that disaster but the most pertinent one might be called *Fischer's Correction to Rumsfeld*. When Rumsfeld visited Germany in early 2003 Joschka Fischer pointed out to him that "*you have to make the case*", i.e. explain a persuasive rationale for action, not just act using superior force, or otherwise your action will not attract legitimacy.
11. The relevance of that analogy should be more obvious than the relevance of the first analogy. The reason why the Executive should adopt the referendum proposed above on its Renewal proposals is this. The deleterious consequences of relying on despotic rather than infrastructural power when undertaking administrative reform in a university context will be great, and much greater than the Executive imagines.
12. One example may suffice to illustrate this. It seems that there will be *only one level of administratively recognised decision-making* below the super college level. How that amounts to fulfilling the golden principle of *subsidiarity* is hard to fathom. The odds appear to be on Schools (or super Schools) being the administrative unit below the College, which implies a substantial diminution in the existing role of Disciplines at UWA. This aspect of the proposals has not yet been made explicit, which is why further consultation is necessary. However, any attempt to diminish the Discipline level of administration at UWA will *reduce not increase* the capacity of the Executive to use infrastructural rather than despotic power to facilitate administrative change.

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