

What is the role of the Dean internally?

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It is best if I first describe the leadership structure in the Law School of which I am Head, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg ('Wits as we all call it in South Africa).

Until 2001, the current School of Law at Wits was the Law Faculty, one of nine faculties. In 2001, the various faculties were amalgamated to create five, one of which is the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management. The former Law Faculty became one of the five Schools in this Faculty, the other four being the School of Economic and Business Sciences, the School of Accountancy, the Graduate School of Business Administration and the Graduate School of Public and Development Management. The Law Faculty was forced into this arrangement against the overwhelming objection to its 'downgrading' by the academic members of the Faculty. The given reasons for the restructuring were the valued synergies of cross-disciplinary work that would follow and the benefits of devolving power to the new super-Faculties. Neither of these advantages accrued to the new School of Law. The other Schools in its Faculty are not research-intensive and their disciplines do not have the centuries-old tradition of academic values, so that the School of Law is an anomaly in its Faculty for being so strongly academic, as opposed to professional or commercial. In fact, its academic standing is undervalued and even resented in the Faculty. Nor did the second projected advantage of the restructuring materialize for the new School of Law: rather than experiencing an increase in its powers, many of these powers were assumed upwards into the Faculty.

In 2001 the Dean of the Law Faculty became the Head of the School of Law. (For external purposes, the Head is still known as the Dean.) The Head reports to the Dean of the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management. The Head runs the School together with the Management Committee of the School (Mancom). Mancom is constituted according to the standing orders approved by the Faculty, and consists of the Head, and the chairpersons of the major Committees and the key portfolio holders in the School (all academics), as well as two elected academic staff and the Administrative Manager of the School. Literally everything in the School is the ultimate responsibility of the Head. Mancom is as strong as the Head and its other members want it to be. Practically, the ideal division of leadership between the Head and Mancom is that the Head is responsible for day-to-day leadership and for initiating a vision for the School, and Mancom makes big-policy decisions. The actual running of the School is divided between the Head; the Administrative Manager, who is not an academic, who holds a permanent position, and reports to the Head; and the various chairpersons of Committees and key portfolio holders. The major Committees and portfolios include the Curriculum Development Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Timetable and Workloads Committee, the International Exchanges Committee, the Law Library Committee, the Postgraduate Studies Committee, and the Research Advisor. The stronger the occupier of these

chairs or portfolio, the stronger the running of the School. The chairpersons and portfolio holders are chosen by the Head. The problem with appointing strong people to these positions is the relative shortage of good, willing administrators, the aversion by many senior staff to taking their leadership responsibilities seriously, and the pressure to appoint younger, less mature staff, because administration is a requirement of promotion. (Since April this year, there is a Deputy Head in place.)

Against this long background, a few points can be made about the Role of the Dean Internally:

1. Although externally the Law Dean is respected as a position of achievement and influence, internally the Headship is a job almost no academic wants. We become academics because we enjoy the rewards of teaching and the stimulation of research, as well as the relatively relaxed working conditions. Being Head of the Wits Law School does not allow me any time for teaching and research, and I have stopped trying to make vain space for these activities. The volume of administrative work is so huge. I worry, though, about what sort of an academic career I will return to at the end of my term of office. When the Heads of Schools were created in the restructuring at Wits in 2001, the talk was that Heads would be on a new career path, that of management, within the University. There is a possible danger that managerial jobs will attract those who are unsuccessful as academics and who do not understand the academic enterprise well.
2. I want to emphasize the sheer volume of administrative work that my position involves. Not only do I not have time for teaching and research, I don't have sufficient time to be a leader. In the last decade the bureaucracy of a university has ballooned so much that it is truly run not by academics, who are second-class citizens, but by the administrators. Although academics do the core business of the university, their work is subjected to the superior demands of the administrators. I regard it as perhaps my major task to protect academics and their work, from untoward interference by the administration. This is at the cost of my own leadership: I have to be more an administrator than a leader. I often laugh at the correspondence I receive imposing yet another task on the Head of School and wonder at what mythical creature is in mind for all this work.
3. For me the challenge is to rise about the demands of day-to-day administration, and never to lose sight of the bigger plan for improvement of the School. I am repeatedly astonished, though, at how unprepared and unskilled I am for this, true, leadership. When I took on the Headship, I thought that it would be a version of my academic career, but in fact I switched to a quite a different job. I whittled down my term of office from the normal five-year period to a three-year period (because of my concern about not doing research during my Headship) and I now see that three years is too short a time to learn the job and become effective, and even five years seems too brief. One needs time to learn from one's mistakes and time to achieve over. One of the lessons of leadership for me has been the importance of choosing a very few important goals, articulating these clearly to all, and persuading the right people of their

importance. I believe in the value of professional development programmes, but ones initiated by the university and tailored to the university's goals and practical constraints. I am flustered by people who see how the Law School should improve but can't see the impossible constraints imposed by the University. The battle which I have to win is for my university to believe in the importance of an excellent Law School. In part it is to convince the university that law is important, in a context where government emphasis and spending is on the sciences (as though the revolution in South Africa in 1994 were scientific!). Part of the battle is to convince the university to plough more of the Law School's earnings back into the School, and not to take for granted a good, cheap School, for the School can go down (while still earning easy money) while other Law Schools go up.

4. On the subject of best governance, it is obvious to me that a Head or Dean cannot achieve anything substantial without strong, active support: whether it is from university management, from the senior academics in the School, or from a democratic cross-section of the School. Law Schools are too big for one person to be a strong leader by herself. If university management is going to be one's source of strength and support, one first has to have management which thinks its Law School is a good one and should be supported to become better. It was the practice in the Wits Law School until about a decade ago that the full professors governed the School through a hands-on Governing Committee. Correctly accused though it was of being undemocratic and often partisan, there was at least committed strong leadership. I am ambivalent about the current Management Committee in my School: it is more democratic, but it is as powerful as the Head of School, its chairperson, wants it to be. It consists of many relatively junior members of staff who often have less maturity and experience than is desired, plus they take care with what they say for fear of this affecting their promotion. Nor is it entirely fair to impose management responsibility on early-career academics. The pity is that senior academics are less committed to the Law School than their previous counterparts were: even the hard workers draw the line at which they will stop being dedicated. These are more selfish times. And the bureaucracy of the University is so demanding, inefficient and foolish, that academics have to learn to protect their academic work from intrusion.