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# Working for the University



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# Working for the University

Dies lecture by

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## 1. The campus novel

Professor Rufus Dingelam is thoroughly annoyed that since universities became blighted by democratisation, he has to spend so much of his valuable time in meetings with people who have no idea what they are talking about. And even more annoying, he is turned out of his room as a result of a decision taken democratically. You may recognise Professor Dingelam, Nobel Prizewinner, from W.F. Herman's *Onder professoren* published in 1975. Hermans describes the decision-making process that resulted in the office move forced on Professor Dingelam:

“The lab council, comprising 2 professors, 20 scientific officers, 50 students and 30 secretaries, instrument-makers, technicians and cleaners as well as the janitor met for two days, from early morning to late into the night, to discuss the issue. A decision was reached. The janitor - a lazy communist - had the deciding vote.”

Those of you who can recall the Dutch universities of the seventies, will be unlikely to look back fondly at this period. It was time when the following scenario was more than likely: the University Council of university X, located in Y, passed a motion on such and such a date that the South African government should ban apartheid with immediate effect. Until that happens there should be no exchange whatsoever between our university and any university in South Africa. Meetings of the Executive Board, that comprised 5 people, could last for days, and meetings of the University Council could go on for whole nights. This was the era of the democratic university, that was successor to the professorial university and that was to result in the bureaucratic university. And today, with the professional university, we have arrived at the network university.

In the coming 35 minutes I would like to reflect with you on the theme of ‘Working for the university’, looking at the subject

from three different perspectives. To start with, what does it mean to work for the university as an academic, a member of staff or a Board member? Is it challenging, interesting, fulfilling? Is life at the university ‘a life of the mind?’

The second meaning of ‘Working for the university’ is about working on the future of the university. Working on making the university a finer, better, more excellent, more pleasant and more challenging institution. Working on the continuity of an institution that together with the Roman Catholic church is one of Europe’s oldest institutions.

And last but not least we have the perspective of labour law, which I, for one, am unlikely to overlook. Why am I legally classed as a civil servant and my colleagues at the VU and in Tilburg are not; what is the difference and why is it different? And is our Collective Labour Agreement that covers 50,000 university staff in the Netherlands a reasonable document, compared with other collective labour agreements, for instance? And why is there a CLA if hardly anyone is a member of any of the unions that are party to the CLA? Are the staff at a university not capable of concluding a contract themselves on an individual basis? Why can’t all our employees vote on the CLA by internet?

There are different ways of approaching the question of what it is like to work for the university, or in a broader sense, to work in academia. One of my favourite sources of information on the subject is the so-called ‘campus novel’, or the professor novel or university novel as it is also known. Apart from Hermans’ *Onder Professoren* there are not many examples of the campus novel in Dutch literature. Of course, there are novels that feature professors, or where academia plays a role (such as Voskuil’s *Het Bureau* or Karel van het Reve’s novel *Twee minuten stilte*, that contains a famous description of the procession of professors for a PhD defence: a procession of dishevelled santas is how they are described. But that was back in 1971.) The real sources are found in Anglo Saxon literature,

by English, American, Australian or New Zealand authors. A Norwegian author recently made a contribution to the genre. Under the title *De besten onder ons*, Helene Uri, a Swede by birth, wrote a novel set in the Institute for Linguistics at the University of Oslo. I quote from her work:

“A university is a poorly sterilised preserving jar. (...) It is in a state of chronic botulism. (...) For an outsider the system within a university can seem quite liberal. But in the hermetically sealed jar, under the closed lid, there is a strict regime in force. The staff keep a close watch on one another. (...) If you're not successful, you will be despised. But those individuals who are successful are no better off. If you are a good lecturer and popular with your students, you will be regarded with suspicion. If you put too much effort into showcasing your knowledge and you make frequent appearances in newspapers and on TV, you will be the object of gossip typifying you as too superficial and too populist. The general rule is: the fewer readers you have, the better your research. But if you only publish in respectable journals, and you are awarded prestigious academic prizes, you are guaranteed to be excluded from good company at the lunch table.”

This quote is typical of how academics are described in many campus novels: vain individuals, promiscuous, seething with jealousy and envy, travelling the world as ‘the jet set of the economy class’, dissatisfied with so many things, yet irrefutably addicted and devoted to science. In her book *Faculty Towers* Princeton professor Elaine Showalter gives a wonderful exposé of 50 years of the academic novel. Showalter writes about:

“I have been a character in academic fiction at least twice. Once a voluptuous, promiscuous, drug-addicted bohemian, once a prudish, dumpy, judgmental frump. I hope I am not too easily identified in either of these guises... although I can tell you that I preferred being cast as the luscious Concord grape to my role as the withered prune.”

Showalter makes a classification of the campus novel from the 50s to the present day. We just have to accept that as academics we love classifying things, documenting them and putting them in order. This is Showalter's classification.

The 50s, the *Ivory Towers*, was indeed the era of the ivory towers, the old-fashioned professorial university. The 60s, the *Tribal Towers*, the period when every department was a university its own right and anyone who worked or studied there was part of the tribe. The 70s, the *Glass Towers*, the time when many new universities were founded and university buildings were designed with glass taking the place of the rather passé marble or brick. The 80s, the *Feminist Towers* and the 90s, the *Tenured Towers*. Her classification ends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the *Tragic Towers*.

There's a great temptation to name authors from all these categories and to quote from their works. We could talk about C.P. Snow's *The Masters* from 1951 or Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*. There is also *Pnin* by Nabokov, the hilarious books by David Lodge, such as *Changing Places*, *Small World* and *Nice Work*. And then later in the 80s, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow, with the high point for Roth being his novel *The Human Stain* in the 90s. These were the years of political correctness at American universities. In what I personally consider to be one of his best novels, Philip Roth described the downfall of Professor of Classical Languages and Dean of the Faculty, Coleman Silk. As Dean, Silk did not always make friends with those around him. That costs him dearly. In his lectures on classical languages at the start of the academic year, for example, he remarks that a number of students are absent for the third time. He asks the other students if anyone knows where these ‘spooks’ are. This English American word has a number of different meanings. The first of these is ‘ghost’, but the third, outmoded meaning has a discriminatory connotation towards coloured people. Professor Silk is accused of discrimination against black students and is

required to plead his case before a faculty committee set up for the purpose. He loses the case and is dismissed. He has been reported to the committee by a female member of staff from his faculty who bore a grudge against him. The novel is about much more than this, but this particular issue shows how disturbed working relations can have seriously damaging consequences. This is not something that is peculiar to the U.S. Publications about the violation of academic integrity within Dutch universities show that many of these issues occur against a background of conflicting working relationships. These conflicts are sometimes fought out under the guise of integrity, although it should be said that this is not the reason why university Academic Integrity Committees were set up.

The impression of universities that people gain from reading Campus novels is by no means always positive. The people who work at universities are more or less normal human beings. Many Campus novels are ironical or satirical, parodying academic life at a university, and they also give us a lot to laugh about. They hold a mirror up to us, in many instances reflecting a none too flattering picture. The reasons why this stands out lies in the paradox of, on the one hand, the high ideals that academia strives for, seeking the truth and nothing but the truth, and on the other hand the fact that the people we are talking about are normal human beings with all their shortcomings, failings and weaknesses. As the university world becomes increasingly part of the normal adult world outside academia, and academics are less and less cloistered in ivory towers, the more difficult it will become to write successful campus novels. All the more reason for me to encourage you to enjoy and absorb and the successful works in this disappearing genre. Meanwhile, life at a university that is at the heart of the real world, without ivory or any other kind of towers, suits most of us extremely well. Of course, it is a pity that a more business-like university produces fewer anecdotes about eccentric academics and their doings.

## 2. Governance

Naturally, if, like me, you have spent 20 years working in all kinds of Board positions in universities you couldn't help but reflect on 'Working for the university' from a university management perspective. If we apply the same division of our time as in *Faculty Towers* that I just mentioned, you could make the following division, partly taken from Mattens and Ritzen, *Van rups tot vlinder*, 2004.

- a) In the 50s and 60s we were in the era of the professorial university. The professors were firmly in charge in all respects, in terms of teaching, research and how the university was managed. The Rector was appointed for one year, and then as a volunteer from the corps of professors. In the wave of democratisation that washed over the Netherlands and Europe at the end of the 60s, the professorial university bit the dust, to be replaced in the 70s by...
- b) *The democratic university*. Following the establishment of the Karl Marx University in Tilburg in 1968 and the occupation of the Maagdenhuis in Amsterdam in 1969, politicians were quick to react. In 1970 the Veringa Act was passed, radically changing how universities were governed. Under the terms of this Act, university management was subsequently based on the model of the municipality and municipal council, with budgeting rights for the University Council. The Act on University Governance (*WUB: Wet Universitaire Bestuurshervorming*) removed the curatorium, the senate and the Rector as absolute governor over the university. The university was divided into units along disciplinary lines, with specialist departments, Faculty Boards, Faculty Councils, University Councils and Executive Boards made up of five members. Universities became a republic of councils.

At the start of my talk I gave you an example of the hilarious results that this form of governance could give rise to. In the newly formed departments, discussions started in September and went on well into the academic year about the list of compulsory reading material for the current year. Was there enough Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas in the literature, for instance? If not, there would be threats of occupying the university premises.

These were turbulent and exciting times. It was also the time when law students began setting up legal aid shops because they felt that access to the law was too expensive for ordinary people. And it was also the time when science shops were started to bring science closer to the public. The democratic university took up a lot of the time of professors, academic staff, students and others who worked there.

Many issues were politicised. In the words of Professor Hans Daalder 'an institutionalisation of conflicting interests' had taken place. But, as frequently happens with revolutions, the enthusiasm gradually waned and the democratic university gave way to...

- c) *The bureaucratic university.* The 80s were the time of the first major economies; yes, there was a crisis then, too. We had the first Lubbers cabinet that came up with such measures as the memorable proposal to cut civil servants' salaries by 3%. It was no easy task to implement cutbacks within the universities because not all of them had an adequate financial structure. A study by the National Audit Office referring to financial chaos at universities (Mattens & Ritzen, 2004) bears witness to this. Partly in answer to this problem, a distinction was made between governance and management. Governance was placed in the hands of academics who were to occupy themselves with how teaching and research were managed, and non-

academic staff who became responsible for university administration. As the staff responsible for university governance were constantly changing, with deans being appointed for just one or two years, it was the administrators or bureaucrats who made the decisions.

In the second half of the 80s a visionary memorandum was published, drawn up by Deetman and In 't Veld at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The memorandum was entitled *Hoger Onderwijs, Autonomie en Kwaliteit (Higher Education, Autonomy and Quality)*, known in the jargon as the HOAK memorandum. It prescribed that Higher Education should be more separate from the state, that there should be a more integral form of management rather than the separation between governors and administrators, and that retrospective professional accountability should be introduced in the form of annual accounts and annual reports. Quality control systems were put in place; the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (the VSNU) was set up, and the Academic Council was disbanded. The HOAK memorandum led directly to...

- d) *The professional university.* Slowly but surely, the 90s saw the emergence of larger entities, sub-faculties were scrapped, smaller faculties were merged to form larger ones, UMCs were established, that integrated the Faculties of Medicine within the academic hospitals. Responsibility was placed in the hands of the Faculty Deans, who were appointed by the Executive Board and remained in post for 4 to 5 years. These were professors with management capabilities who were actively sought out and appointed. The maxim that then prevailed was: 'the professional at the helm'.

These changes were incorporated into the amended WHW in 1998, under the leadership of Minister Ritzen. This Act sets out and records how universities are to be governed. It also covers the separation of academic

institutions from the Ministry. The members of the Executive Board are no longer appointed by the Minister but by a Board of Governors. The Ministry no longer meddles in the nitty gritty of how universities are managed. Universities receive an annual sum from the Ministry, the so-called first flow of funding, and they can largely decide for themselves how the funds are to be used. State universities were to become independently governed institutions, operating at a distance from the state and being responsible for managing their own academic, governance and financial affairs. Anyone who has anything to do with university governance in Europe will know how jealous people in Germany, France, Southern Europe and the Scandinavian countries are of this vision of governance for Dutch universities. It has certainly done us no harm. The quality of Dutch science has reached new heights over the past 15 years, the years of autonomy in governance. As we all know, the *Times Higher Education Supplement* in the latest review from 2012 of the quality of science across the globe ranked Dutch universities in third place after the United States and the UK: an unprecedented and under-valued champion performance that is directly related to the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by Dutch universities.

Under pressure from debacles in Higher Professional Education (HBO) and Senior Secondary Vocational Education (MBO), such as at *In Holland* and *Amarantis*, the pressure from government to reduce autonomy increased. Politicians responded to every incident in true Pavlovian style by imposing more rules, more inspection and more supervision and allowing less autonomy. All quite understandable in the light of the desire to please the electorate in a populist era, but from an academic and governance viewpoint, not sensible at all. We need Ministers of Education who do not give way to the call for more rules and more supervision. We need Ministers who are delighted to recognise the leading position of

Dutch science in the world and who are prepared to communicate the benefits of autonomy. This is the only way for top quality science to continue to flourish. I say this whilst at the same time appreciating that autonomy always has to exist in an environment of 'checks and balances' and a healthy portion of regulation.

### 3. The network university

The professional university is now merging seamlessly into the network university. A network is an amalgam of connections with junctions and crossroads. A professional university is an institution governed by academic professionals and peopled by scientists who in many cases are more than capable of holding their own in the company of the world's elite work, together regionally, nationally and internationally in varying circuits and varying networks.

It is highly stimulating to reread Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells against the background of the developments in business, institutions and states that have taken place over the last ten years. In his *The Information Age* (1995) and his later *The rise of the network society* (2010), he gives a good description of the information and network society.

All around us we see evidence that we have left the 20<sup>th</sup> century of industry behind us and have landed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of the network society. Across the borders of universities and countries, scientists are creating international virtual disciplinary and interdisciplinary networks that determine the status of science in a particular field. Leiden astronomers have been among the world's top for a very long time. But there is no longer an observatory on the Rapenburg or the Witte Singel. No, the key observatory is now in Chile on top of a bare mountain. Debates about the substance of the discipline are now conducted at global level - and the same applies to all fields of science.

Increasingly, consortia are being formed, some based on substantial scientific grounds, others for political reasons to do with subsidies. A good illustration of this last reason is the competition in 2012 for the Gravity Subsidy from the Ministry of Education. Without exception, the awards have gone to consortia made up of scientists from different universities. The same applies at European level. In December two Leiden scientific networks were awarded the Synergy Grant by the European Research Council: a physics network located in Leiden and Delft and an archaeology in Leiden, Amsterdam and Heidelberg.

The development of these networks is stimulated by what I would refer to as 'The triple O'. The triple O will be the focus of a lot of attention in governance and scientific circles in the coming years. I am referring to Open Access, Open Courseware and Open Data Storage. By Open Access we mean the commitment to scientific publications being freely and publicly available. We now have the situation where journals owned by publishers like Elsevier and Springer prevent the free accessibility of scientific publications by setting high subscription rates for their journals, and they do not give the authors the freedom to make their publications available in Open Access. Both the NWO and the ERC and other

European institutions support the concept of Open Access and are planning to amend their policies accordingly. By Open Courseware we mean the movement that has gained momentum in recent years, putting university courses, textbooks, lectures, etc., online. Major Ivy League American universities such as Harvard, MIT, Princeton and Berkeley are moving in this direction. The question is how will Dutch universities react to this development? In Leiden last month we saw enormous interest in our MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on European Law. Open Data and Open Data Storage are also hot topics in the context of the discussion about combating academic fraud. The data used in scientific production should be openly available for everyone who would like to check the data and discuss the results presented.

Finally, the rapid arrival of the network university will not be without its consequences. In the literature on public administration we find, for example, contributions from such authors from W. Powell, *Neither market nor hierarchy: network forms of organizations* (1990) or Goldschmidt and Eggers, *Governing by network, the new shape of the Public Sector* (2004). J.A.G.M. van Dijk further developed Powell's typology of hierarchy, market and network. The diagram on the next page shows this.

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	Market	Network	Hierarchy
Reason for existence	Contract, ownership rights	Core competence	Employer/employee
Structure	Independent	Independent	Dependent
Goal	Profit	Mutual benefit	Career
Resources	Price	Involvement	Routine
Relations	Competition	Competition <i>and</i> cooperation	Vertical
Dimension of control	Horizontal	Horizontal and vertical	Vertical
Coordination	Horizontal	Horizontal and vertical	Vertical
Conflict management	Commercial transaction, legal procedure	Trust, reputation	Procedure, supervision
Flexibility	High	Medium	Low

The classical governance methods such as the hierarchical method, top-down management of an organisation, or market forces, driven by competition and profit maximisation, are no longer effective in a network society. I quote public administration expert Van Dijk: 'The most important characteristic of the network as a management style is the combination of horizontal and vertical control. It is not based only on vertical control and coordination as with hierarchy, nor is it based on a horizontal structure as with the market, but on linking central and decentral structures. So, what does an organogram of a network organisation look like? That brings me to an anecdote about a famous American management guru who was fascinated by CERN in Geneva and its operational style. He wanted to know what model people used there? The guru went to Geneva, talked to a lot of people and returned home empty handed: they didn't have a model; they had a network. (With thanks to Jan van der Boon who has worked at CERN himself and who shared this anecdote with me).

In the network university the hierarchical construct of departments, faculties and a central Executive Board will increasingly give way to network structures where the decisions are prepared, discussed and commented on before finally being approved by the relevant authority. Of course, there will still be a need for organisations such as our own that expend half a billion euros a year to account for how they have used these resources. But, everywhere we will see an increase in flexibility, interdependence and the need for mutual trust.

#### **4. Labour relations in the network university**

And what about labour relations in the network university? Employment law is specifically a 20<sup>th</sup> century invention. It is a typical product of the industrial era and we have just stated that this is behind us and that we are now in the network age. At the point where these eras intersect we see phenomena that have probably had their day. A short while ago, a new Collective Labour Agreement (CAO) was agreed for the

university sector. Negotiations were conducted on behalf of the employees by union organisations who represent only a small section of the employees in the university sector, and no young employees at all. In other words, there are very few people today who are members of a union. Nonetheless the union organisations are the only negotiating party for the employees and they determine whether or not the Collective Labour Agreement will come into force. Why not consult all the employees in the sector about the negotiators outcome rather than just the members of the unions?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century CAO is in dire need of a 21<sup>st</sup> century facelift. The same applies to other aspects of employment law within the university world. Why is there a difference in the legal position between workers of the old state universities and the former confessional universities such as the VU, Tilburg and Nijmegen? Of course, there are historical explanations for this difference, but that doesn't seem to be a good reason to preserve this difference in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Why do employees of the former state universities have the legal status of civil servants? We have just stated that since 1998 when universities became more autonomous, they also became more separate from the state so there is no longer any reason to treat employees of the state and employees of a university the same. Why are the staff of NWO civil servants and the staff of the FOM Foundation, who fall under the NWO, employees? There may be historical reasons, but in today's world these reasons make no sense.

And what about worker participation. There, too, we seem to be due for a new phase of development. Involving staff in governance issues also takes place increasingly via informal networks rather than by exchanging formal documents and holding formal consultations. Network co-participation will increasingly take over from formal co-participation.

In the coming years I am going to enjoy working on developing labour relations and employment law appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and there is a lot to do.

## 5. Conclusion

Working for the network university is all senses of the word a privilege, a pleasure and a source of great fulfilment. It is less a 'life of the mind' and more of a life with, of and within networks. The theme of 'Working for the university' is a stimulus for reflection in all its forms and guises. Personally, I have thoroughly enjoyed my work for Leiden University over the past six years. But what is 6 years out of 438? In the 80s I also worked here for 7 years, again with much enjoyment. So, I could say what is 13 years out of 438? I hope I will have the good fortune to work here for at least another 7 years. And then I will be able to say: what is 20 years out of 438? It is but a glimmer, a crack of light, a split second in eternity.

Let me just return to literature and to the beautifully crafted sentences from Nabokov's *Speak Memory*, so brilliantly translated by Rien Verhoef, soon to be Honorary Doctor.

Nabokov begins his autobiography with the world-famous words:

"The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness. Working for the university is my brief crack of light.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the end of a lecture there is usually an opportunity to pay some thanks. I have attended hundreds of lectures in past years and have had ample opportunity to assess how long the audience is able to listen and remain engaged. It's about 15 minutes, I would say. By the time the speaker gets around to saying 'Now I would like to thank a few people', the audience comes to life again. It's the point where, on the basis of long experience, I often think: 'Are there going to be tears, or can we keep a dry eye?' When you get to the point of thanking your family and your partner, body language - often against your will - takes over and that dry eye is harder to maintain. But

that's not in my plan for today, in this setting; it's something for later, in private.

Nonetheless, there are a number of people whom I would especially like to thank. Without an excellent secretariat and an exceptional PA you simply cannot do this kind of job. Their qualities add to your own. Yvonne and Hetty: thank you both. You also can't manage without good colleagues: deans, directors and all the other staff of Administration and Central Services and in the faculties: again, many thanks. I also wish to thank my colleague Willem te Beest, with whom I have had the pleasure of working for six intense and excellent years. It was at times challenging, we achieved a lot and we had many laughs along the way.

I have spoken.

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In his Dies lecture *Working for the University*, Van der Heijden focuses on the three ways this expression can be interpreted. What does it mean to work at the university as a member of staff, a professor and/or a Board member? How can you work for the university so that you improve it and make it a more attractive institution? And finally, what about labour law at universities? These questions will be addressed from three perspectives: the literary perspective of the 'Campus Novel', the viewpoint of how a university can best be governed and the perspective of labour law.



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