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Modelling University Governance

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# Modelling University Governance

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## **Abstract**

Twentieth century governance models used in public universities are subject to increasing doubt across the English-speaking world. Governments question if public universities are being efficiently governed; if their boards of trustees are adequately fulfilling their trust obligations towards multiple stakeholders; and if collegial models of governance are working in increasingly complex educational environments. With declining public funding for tertiary education, growing international competition among institutions of higher learning in our information age and worrisome evidence of dysfunctional governance, critics question if established governance structures are able to meet these and other challenges. Some insist that members of faculty are most suited to govern public universities because they appreciate the vision and mission of the university. Others demand that boards of governors be skilled in financial matters and drawn primarily from corporate life. Yet others call for governance based on trust and confidence between those who govern and those who are governed. The article evaluates competing trends in models of university governance in the United Kingdom, the British Commonwealth and the United States. Arguing against a one-size-fits-all model, it sets out specific factors to consider in reforming governance models to meet the demands of our times.

# Modelling University Governance

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## Abstract

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## Introduction

This article explores the connection between the good practice and the good governance in university governance by boards of governors, regents or trustees across the British Commonwealth and the United States. The paper identifies five primary models of board level governance in universities: (1) faculty; (2) corporate; (3) trustee governance; (4) stakeholder; and (5) amalgam models of governance. It discusses how these models work in practice. It concentrates on governance by boards of governors at the same time considering bicameral governance divided between governing boards and academic senates as well as between faculty and

student governing bodies (Sturmer, 1971). The analysis demonstrates that each governance model serves different purposes in different contexts and at different times. Whatever the virtue of a governance model may be in the abstract, its functional value hinges on how it is applied in a particular case. Ultimately, each governance model is only as effective as those who craft it along with those who order their lives in light of it.

### Some preliminary comments

The term ‘governance’ refers to the ‘processes of decision-making within an institution [which] . . . enable an institution to set its policies and objectives, to achieve them, and to monitor its progress towards their achievement’ (Oxford, 2006). Governance of public universities is significantly influenced by government policy, with particular emphasis on efficiency. The Jarrett Report focused on the efficiency of governance (Jarrett Report, 1985). The Dearing Committee (NCIHE, 1997, para 73) a decade later, recommended on the ‘effectiveness of management and governance arrangements’ in universities. It also recognised three guiding principles: institutional autonomy, academic freedom and openness:

- institutional autonomy should be respected;
- academic freedom within the law should be protected;
- governance arrangements should be open and responsive.

The Dearing Report emphasised that universities had to become more efficient, given the dramatic decline in public funding per student. Universities also had to become more accountable, more collaborative and more responsive to financial dictates in meeting these challenges.

The *Guide for Members of Higher Education Governing Bodies in the United Kingdom* (CUC, 2004), initiated in 1995 and consolidated in 2004, serves as a more explicit code of governance practice. Devised by the Committee of University Chairmen (CUC), it provides that governing bodies in UK universities act responsibly, meet regularly, approve the vision and mission statement of the university, and appoint and guide management. Providing for governance structures and processes, it sets out guidelines on the selection of members by a nomination committee, processes for induction of members, procedures for meetings including open hearings and provision for performance standards measured against key performance indicators. The guide also includes ‘principles of governance’ for the board’s proper conduct of public business, strategic planning, effective monitoring, and finance and audit, among other functions (CUC, 2004). An evolving guide on good governance practice,

the CUC Committee does not purport to provide a blueprint on the operation of university governance itself (Committee of University Chairmen (CUC), 2007).

The purpose of this paper is not to rehash either the Dearing Report or the CUC guidelines, but to scrutinise competing models of governance that together serve as components in the complex structures of university governance. Comparative in nature, the study analyses models of university governance, not only in the UK, but also in Australia and the United States.

### **Crises of confidence**

Why are governments, universities and the public often preoccupied with governance? Most universities face crises of confidence in governance at some stage in their evolution (Filler, 1965; Lazerson, 1997; Hines, 2000). Some problems are distinctly structural, such as arising out of large boards of governors representing diffuse interest groups. Many are financial, such as stemming from pressing financial exigencies owing to government cutbacks or declining local or international enrolments. Some relate to the governance of dysfunctional units within otherwise well-governed universities. Many problems arise simply because public universities are constantly in a state of flux and metamorphosis that is in the nature of academic life (Millett, 1978; Corson, 1979; Beach, 1985; Barnett, 1994; Kezar, 2004).

Frequently, perceived governance crises prompt governing bodies to make exaggerated changes in governance models in order to produce radical different results. Such overreaction may protract bad governance practice, as when glitches in personnel and financial systems lead to micromanaged financial systems in which every transaction is scrutinised for irregularities. Similar overreactions can occur in human resource management, as when deficiencies in the management of personnel prompt overzealous reaction, typified by mandating personnel training programs *ad nauseam* to nip peripheral problems in the bud. Such overzealousness may be accompanied by exaggerated efforts at public disclosure, rendering accountability in the public interest into an exuberance that misunderstands the significance of transparent compliance on the public record.

Governance problems may be exacerbated, as when boards of governors or senior managers overrespond to crises or clash over the management of those crises. Equally troubling is the problem of universities dealing secretly with fissures in their governance structures, seeking to

shut down the source of the fissure or paper it over with an incomplete solution rather than deal with it directly. An example would be sustained spending on academic programmes that fail to produce promised revenue streams, coupled with fictional or feigned compliance with governance models directed at reducing those expenditures. The result all too often is a lack of openness in applying a governance model to a particular case or an unwillingness to recognise the need to apply that model at all (Mortimer (1971); Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973 and 1982).

### **Modelling new governance structures**

A one-size-fits-all model of governance does not exemplify 'good' practice (Young, 2003; Edwards, 2006). Conversely, governance problems may be comparable at different tertiary institutions. The need is to avoid replicating bad practice while trying to benchmark good practice.

Modelling new governance structures at universities requires a sustained commitment to identifying what an institution was, what it is and what it might become. Such modelling ordinarily should be conducted within the framework of a strategic planning exercise, including preparing stakeholders for prospective change. Modelling should also be politically informed. Every model of governance has political ramifications that need to be considered without becoming captive to them (Gilmour, 1991b; Trow, 1998; Gallagher, 2001; Pusser and Ordorika, 2001).

In effect, governing bodies should serve as the agents of change. More often than not, resistance to change stems from a lack of stomach to initiate or complete change for fear of acting precipitously, too soon or too late. The test of a governing body's capacity for change ultimately lies in its willingness and ability not only to recognise deficiencies in governance models but also to arrive at viable means of remedying them (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973).

### **Five models of university governance**

#### *University governance by the academic staff*

The most traditional model of university governance assumes that universities should principally be governed by their academic staff, which is sometimes identified with collegial governance. This usually occurs either by granting expansive governance powers to university senates or by significant faculty representation on boards of governors, or both (Moore, 1975; Strohm, 1981; Gilmour, 1991a; Lee, 1991; Griffith, 1993; Trow,

1998; Miller, 1999; Jordan, 2001). A pervasive reason for this model is that academic staff ordinarily are best equipped to understand the academic goals and aspirations of a university and how to achieve them (Pfnister, 1970; Williams et al., 1987; Dill and Helm, 1988; Evans, 1999).

The faculty governance model is subject to different pressures. On one hand, it is the most attacked of the governance models (Burgan, 1998). On the other hand, it is the governance model that universities most frequently return to, even if only in part, in the face of difficulties with the alternatives. Frequent criticisms directed at extensive reliance on a faculty governance model are those that pertain to the academic staff often lacking governance skill or interest – in determining governance policy, in relating to stakeholders who are not directly involved in teaching or research and in assuming responsibility for finances and personnel within complex management and financial systems (Villanova University, 1997; Lewis, 2000; UNISA, 2003). Nevertheless, despite these criticisms the support for faculty governance remains strong.

From a philosophical perspective, faculty governance is associated with ‘academic democracy’ (Dewey, 1966; Hall and Symes, 2005). Typifying such a governance model is the academic democracy associated with Cambridge University. Under its statutes, the governing body of Cambridge University is Regent House, consisting of over 3,000 university officers and college fellows that are responsible for the governance of the university (Cambridge, 2001).

‘Academic democracies’ are currently subject to significant pressure including in bicameral systems in which faculty and board or trustee governance is separated. At concern is the issue that faculty governance will accord a disproportionately greater stress to respecting the university’s independent academic mission, accompanied with less emphasis on improving its corporate capabilities through partnerships with government, commerce and industry (UNISA, 2003; Coaldrake, Stedman and Little, 2003). Even under the Cambridge model of ‘academic democracy’, key executive and policy-making functions at Cambridge are statutorily vested in a university council. As that council is accountable to the academic body, Regent House, in practice, it also exercises key executive functions for and on behalf of the university.

Faculty governance is also doubted on grounds that the academic staff may lack the requisite skill in financial management and accountability. Even the vice-chancellor at Cambridge has expressed doubts about financial management, reduced government funding and accountability for governance decision-making there (Scott, 1996; Middlehurst, 2004; Cambridge Vice-Chancellor, 2005).

The concern that the academic staff are untrained in governance does not infer that such governance is permanently tainted. Training selected members of academic staff to assume governance roles on boards of governors, as presidents, provosts, vice-presidents and deans is increasingly practiced. American universities have turned the training of university administrators into a business. Harvard Business School offers courses in executive and financial management with huge tuition fees in excess of US\$50,000 (Harvard University, 2007), although organisations like the Chronicle of Higher Education in the United States do so far a lot less (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2007). Such training often involves developing an understanding of the relationship between governance and management, including the responsibility of managers to carry out delegated governance functions. It is also a proactive way in which to prop up deficiencies in academic governance that continues to include academic staff.

Almost all universities rely on academic governance to some degree. However, significant differences arise as to the exclusivity of this model, if it is limited to academic governance as distinct from other forms of governance notably financial (Keller, 1987). Dismissing faculty governance models out of hand amounts to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Faculty governance models have produced positive results in selected areas of governance, such as in building governance structures and strengthening relationships with important constituencies such as unions and students (Plante and Collier, 1989; Kermerer and Baldrige, 1981; Newman and Bartee, 1999; Ramo, 1997 and 2001). It is a model that academic staff can learn to understand, develop and implement (Randell and Miller, 2001).

Despite the resurrection of academic governance, a shift towards 'professional' governance is especially notable in regard to financial matters. Almost apologetic reasons given for resort to such professionalism at universities like Cambridge include, among others, problems of 'chronic under-resourcing', the university's 'inability to adapt quickly to changing demands and circumstances' and its need for 'accountability in the way decisions are taken and implemented' (Cambridge, 2001; Cambridge Vice-Chancellor, 2005).

### *Corporate governance*

The corporate governance model is prevalent today in universities, including in Australia (Collis, 2000; Nelson, 2003; UNISA, 2003; Conside, 2004; Edith Cowan University, 2007). Concentrating on the

fiscal and managerial responsibility of those charged with governance of the university, a corporate governance model is based on a business-case model for universities. It is also grounded in the captivating rationale of corporate efficiency, in reaction to the criticisms that public universities are poorly managed or fiscally inefficient and on the assumption that modelling on corporate governance can redress these deficiencies (Duryea and Williams, 2000; Mingle, 2000). Some public universities outside the United States have moved structurally closer to a corporate governance model, with a chair and smaller board of governors or trustees directing the governance of the university, with a chief executive officer, chief operating officer and chief financial officer serving the board as the senior management team. In some respects, the University of New South Wales is a leader in this development (University of New South Wales, 2007).

Supporters of the corporate governance model insist that universities should be governed by professionals who are trained and experienced in corporate policy and planning, and able to direct management efficiently. Some would expect academics to engage in teaching, research and public service and but also to varying degrees in university governance (Dimond, 1991; Kissler, 1997; Zemsky, Wagner and Massy, 2005).

In contrast, some leading universities dispute any resort to corporate governance. Typifying this view is Oxford University's faculty-wide rejection of the 'managerial bandwagon' of corporate governance. They assert that managerial governance produces only partial and short-term governance solutions (The Guardian, 2006).

The corporate governance model is sometimes highlighted in times of severe economic difficulties, such as what occurred most recently in Ontario, Canada in response to reduced government funding, the abolition of mandatory retirement and the decline in full-fee-paying international students (McMaster University, 2006). It is adopted in Australia, too, to comply with government demands for more cost-effective and cost-reducing university management (Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, 2003; Nelson, 2003).

Academic staff at universities like Oxford passionately refuse to be 'traumatised' by the global wave of institutional controls that have evolved in the corporate sector following the collapse of mismanaged companies like Barings Bank in the United Kingdom in the 1990s (The Guardian, 2006).

A primary criticism of the corporate governance model is that it will lead to the 'commodification' of education, displacing academic distinc-

tiveness in the pursuit of corporate efficiency (Bok, 2003; Geiger, 2004). The classic argument is that universities do not buy and sell 'widgets' (Washburn, 2005).

Yet, even those who are sceptical of corporate governance models in universities admit that 'big universities' include diffuse centres of profit and loss; they have complex budgets; and they 'sell' their educational services to disparate 'buyers' within a competitive and sometimes cut-throat marketplace, not unlike profit-oriented corporations (Lombardi et al., 2002; Kirp, 2003; Schultz, 2005). There is further recognition that public universities increasingly pursue full-fee-paying local and international students to 'balance the books' as much as to advance knowledge (Cohen, 2005). For others, corporate governance may be viewed as necessary to satisfy the immediate fiscal needs of universities; and corporate efficiency is a way in which to do so (Lombardi et al., 2002; Newman, Couturier and Scurry, 2004).

However supportable the case for corporate governance of universities may be, it is distinguishable in both principle and practice from the management of corporations by corporate boards. Universities do not have duties towards corporate shareholders but owe interlocking duties to a range of stakeholders: students, faculty and staff, corporate partners, government and the public at large. University boards are staffed primarily by volunteers and are not subject to identical standards of performance and accountability as corporate boards.

Even if university governors are subject to corporate responsibility to diverse stakeholders, it is necessary to determine to which stakeholders they are primarily responsible to and if those responsibilities are corporate. One view is that primary responsibility is owed variously to students, academic staff, alumni, staff and a range of other stakeholders and investors arising from duties of trust and confidence owed to them (Bess, 1988).

Another view is that the primary stakeholder of public universities ought to be the government, requiring that governing boards comply with statutory duties of disclosure and conflict of interest, not unlike those imposed on corporate directors. The problem is that statutory duties imposed on corporate boards tend to be more onerous than duties imposed by governments on university boards. Governments impose a range of interlocking duties on corporate boards as to how to trade stock, how minority shareholders are to be treated and how insider traders should be constrained. They do not impose comparable duties on the boards of public universities in which stock, minority shareholders and insider traders are alien to.

At the same time, some practical attributes of corporate governance match the requirements of universities. University boards increasingly are expected to govern universities in a fiscally responsible and efficient manner. Board meetings are to be run openly and board members are to be accountable to it. Financial and personnel governance of universities is also increasingly preoccupied with setting key performance indicators for management and monitoring the success in meeting financial targets. It may be that securing philanthropy is a preoccupation of governing boards of universities, as distinct from corporations: but philanthropy is itself a business preoccupation of universities that is often directed at offsetting declines in government funding per student (Dearing Report, 1997).

In summary, universities need to be 'corporatised' to some degree if they are to be governed responsibly. Their differences from profit-oriented corporations should not be used as barriers to them operating in an economically efficient manner. The extent to which universities choose to adopt a corporate governance model depends on the context. The issue is to determine the governance model that best suits the context, knowing that a model suited to one context may be ill-fitting in others.

### *Trustee governance*

The trustee model of university governance has acquired some cogency in universities generally. For example, in 1995, the Hoare Report in Australia that influenced the Dearing Report in the United Kingdom (NCIHE, 1997) recommended the wider adoption of trustee governance and less representational membership (Hoare, 1995).

Trustee governance is different from shared governance. Shared governance, sometimes described as collegial governance, is based on the representational notion that universities ought to be run collegially by those with a stake in it (Ingram, 1993; Griffith, 1993; Morphew, 1999; Swansson et al., 2005). Trustee governance is not directly concerned with stakeholder representation in governance. Rather, it refers to the manner of governance, specifically governance through a 'trust' relationship between a trustee board that acts in trust for, and on behalf of, trust beneficiaries. This trustee model is articulated structurally through the mechanism of trust duties. In effect, trustee boards have the fiduciary duty to discharge their trust 'with the utmost good faith' towards the beneficiaries of that trust (Jackson and Crowley, 2006).

The fiduciary duties of the board and its individual members also includes related duties, such as to exercise the highest levels of diligence

in protecting the trust, including disclosing any factor that might constitute a conflict of interest with that trust (Chait, Holland and Taylor, 1991).

Advocates of trustee governance envisage it as providing the assurance that university governors will act for, and on behalf of, the university and in the diligent discharge of a public trust. Trustee governance also has particular appeal to those who see university governors as having an *in loco parentis* responsibility towards students.

In reality, the trustee model is vague at best. There are few instances of it serving as a pervasive model of governance in public universities, although trusteeship is often invoked to stress how a particular university fulfils its fiduciary duties towards its students, staff, government and the public at large. However, the trustee model does have particular appeal in times of cynicism and preoccupation with ethics and professional responsibility. With some American institutions at the forefront of ethics scandals and with British Commonwealth universities similarly preoccupied, trustee models are resorted to in the face of concerns about the safety and security of students, confidence in senior administrators and worries about intemperate leadership. For example, the forced 2005 resignation of the president of American University for spending excesses and the resignation of the system president of the University of Colorado for failing to discipline staff and students accused of serious offences. (American University, 2005; The Widening Witch Hunt, 2005).

In summary, trustee models remain somewhat vague. They also tend to work around the edges of university governance. A particular risk is that the language of trusteeship may be invoked to prop up a marketing and development campaign. At the same time there is nothing fundamentally wrong with adopting a trustee model of governance in which an incidental benefit of that trust is the mobilisation of a university marketing and development campaign.

### *Stakeholder governance*

A stakeholder model of governance, identified variously with collegial and representative governance, occurs when governance is vested in a wide array of stakeholders including, among others, students, academic staff, alumni, corporate partners, government and the public at large (Baldrige, 1982; Hill, Green and Eckel, 2001; Longin, 2002). The stakeholder model exemplifies shared governance (Schick, 1992; Drummond and Reitsch, 1995; Eckel, 2000; USC, 2006). Distinguishable from faculty governance, it vests governance in multiple representatives

not limited to academic staff. Differentiated from corporate governance, stakeholder governance conceives of governance authorities as broadly representative as distinct from professional and business focused boards; and the stakeholders' mandate extends beyond the efficient management and fiscal responsibility of corporate governance boards (American Association of University Professors, 1966; American Federation of Teachers, 2002).

At its most inclusive, stakeholder governance provides for wide participation by internal and external stakeholders in decision-making beyond the appointment of representatives of a range of stakeholder groups (Alfred, 1985; Gilmour, 1991a; Floyd, 1994; Lapworth, 2004; Currie, 2005). Typifying expansive stakeholder governance is representation on university boards of community groups that, though not formally associated with the university, reflect environmental, ethnic, gender and other public interests that are particularly germane to the university at that time.

The problem with stakeholder governance is in determining which stakeholders ought to be represented on governing bodies, the manner of their representation and the extent of their authority. At its most polarising, stakeholder governance regresses into an ineffective 'talking shop' in which stakeholders falsely assume that they are responsible to the constituent interests that elected or nominated them rather than to the university as a whole.

Despite these deficiencies, public universities generally employ some form of stakeholder governance, notably having nominated or elected members of academic staff, students, or government representatives on their boards. However, they diverge significantly in the composition of those boards, as well as in the authority accorded to disparate stakeholders (Baldrige, 1982; Wolvin, 1991; Leatherman, 1998; McCormack and Brennen, 1999; Baldwin and Leslie, 2001; Gerber, 2001; Tierney, 2001; Gayle, Tewarie and White, 2003).

#### *Amalgam models of governance*

Amalgam models of university governance include some combination of academic staff, corporate, trustee and stakeholder governance (Birnbaum, 1991). Typical of an amalgam model is this statement of governance responsibility:

- building the knowledge base of the whole society;
- profit in the for-profit activities;

- prudent, appropriate and complete expenditure of funds provided by government for specific purposes;
- producing innovations that underpin economic development;
- ensuring freedom for academic staff to provide public comment and give advice on issues in their areas of expertise;
- building critical mass in those discipline or professional areas in which the university seeks to excel;
- providing an environment where students have the opportunity, whatever their background, to achieve all that is possible for them.

The amalgam model usually involves a readiness to experiment with innovation in university governance, such as by providing for extensive consultation on public interest decisions, varying from equity in admissions to environmental protection.

The benefit of an amalgam model of governance is that it is able to incorporate the strengths of different governance models to suit the specific needs of the university (Dearlove, 1997).

### **Benchmarking governance models**

Universities may also benchmark their governance models on other institutions, so long as they recognise the need to adapt them in light of their own particular histories, needs and practices.

Governance models may function differently in response to divergent institutional cultures. A long history of autocratic governance by a board of governors or a president may imbed a distinctly non-collaborative practice of governance even though the model formally presented is one of collaboration.

Universities that claim to benchmark their governance structures on good practice elsewhere, notably in times of crises, may do so as window dressing to appease influential stakeholders or redress disaffection with processes of governance. An allusion of a student-centred model of governance, presenting the university as collaborative and consultative, may deny the reality that governance is aloof from students and their concerns (Keating, 2005). The conception of a bicameral student and a faculty model of governance, working 'separately but equally' may be separate but very unequal in fact. Typifying perceived failures in bicameral student-university governance occur when students protest university governance decisions for being autocratic and for not including the student voice.

### **Modifying governance models in practice**

Governance models need to be responsive to the governance context in which they are applied, though not being subjugated by that context (Tierney, 1999; Miller, 2001). Governance models may also grow tired and would need repairing or replacement. Governance relationships become fractured and need healing. Universities that are attuned to these changes may be able to remodel their governance structures incrementally, accommodating evolving relationship between those who govern and those who are governed and in response to cultural, social, political and economic change (Ikenberry, 1971; Collis, 2000).

In modifying governance models, a first principle is to determine which is sought through that model, and as a matter of application, how and when to do so. These considerations require an understanding of what the pre-existing governance model lacks and what a particular modification might accomplish. If the problem is a scandal, a trustee model that specifically seeks to rebuild trust might be appropriate. If the problem is financial, a corporate model might be more appropriate. If the problem relates to building quality academic programmes, a faculty governance model may be best. If the problem encompasses an amalgam of different issues, an amalgam model might be apposite.

Governance modelling requires careful and periodic review, including identifying how they are working in practice and how they might be modified to work better (Chait, Holland and Taylor, 1991). Modifying governance models should involve an evaluation of the nature of the changes proposed, including how and when to implement them (Hardy, 1990; Schuster, Smith, Corak and Yamada, 1994; Duderstadt, 2001).

Governance models sometimes need immediate, radical and uncompromising modifications. They sometimes need expert third party input to offset the predisposition of internal governors and managers.

#### *Changing structures of governance*

Evaluating the sufficiency of a governance model requires consideration of its structure, operational efficiencies and ways of remedying its deficiencies (Silverman, 1971; Rosovsky, 2001; Rhoades, 1995). Modifying the structure of governance may be required in response to an external crisis, such as to a cutback in government funding or a crisis of confidence in leadership. Governance structures and processes may be changed in response to internal crises such as allegations of misappropriation of funds by university staff, plagiarism by academics or improper

conduct by members of sports teams. These crises may impact upon, and indeed test, both existing governance structures and their operations.

Sometimes defects in the structure of governance models are dressed up as crises of confidence in individuals, such as when ambiguous governance protocols and delegations are recast into crises of confidence in a university president. Such crises often demonstrate the extent to which governance models are misunderstood and can be manipulated.

### *Changing governance relationships*

The success or failure of governance models often depends on relationships, such as between a governing board and a president. The influence of changing relationships may be subtle. For example, a board that adheres to a corporate governance model may hold the president accountable for the profitable operation of the university more than for other purposes. A board that favours a trusteeship model may be more concerned about the extent to which that president has fulfilled a mandate of trust towards specific stakeholders.

Fractured relationships such as between a board and president may lead to changes in governance and management protocols. Making such changes requires a careful scrutiny of the history of the governance relationship, the manner in which decisions have been reached in light of them; the extent to which those decisions conform to governance protocols; the manner in which decision-makers are held accountable for those decisions and by whom; the procedures used to determine ensuing accountability; and the impact of structures and processes of governance upon decision-making itself (Dill, 1971; Kaplan, 2002; Kezar and Eckel, 2004). Illustrating responses to fractured relationships were proposed modifications to protocols governing financial delegations and spending powers of senior managers at American University following the resignation of its President in 2005. A testing issue is to determine the kind and quality of governance structure that is most fitting in each discrete context and how to modify governance relationships to arrive at it. (Association of Governing Boards of Universities, 1996).

The following are suggestions in assessing the sufficiency of governance models:

- Being able to steer a governance course that recognises the reasons behind competing interests in governance and not to endorse any one interest over others on arbitrary grounds.

- Recognising the need for changes in governance structures and important first steps in making such changes.
- Being able to identify and respond to governance issues in advance of a crisis and preferably before too much damage is done.
- Restructuring governance models in conjunction with structural change, such as through reorganising academic and non-academic programmes.

## Conclusions

There is growing debate among public universities in many English-speaking environments about how to deal with governance crises. One fear is that a governance crisis will cause a flight of staff and students to universities elsewhere. A converse fear is that, if a governance crisis is not revealed, the university will implode. One should also not overstate such crises of confidence. Despite highly-publicised conflicts over university governance at some leading public institutions, not least of all at Oxford University, most governance conflicts are resolved and normalcy does resume.

‘Good’ university governance also does not simply happen. It is usually the product of painstaking effort to arrive at suitable governance structures, protocols and processes. ‘Good’ governance is also about timing and judgement: it requires boards of governors to recognise when a governance model is not working, why and how to repair it. Ultimately, governance models are created by people to govern people. They are only as good as they who devise and apply them, as well as those who live by them.

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