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SRHE Annual Conference 12 December 2013

Appointing Pro Vice Chancellors in Pre-1992 Universities: The Myth of Managerialism?

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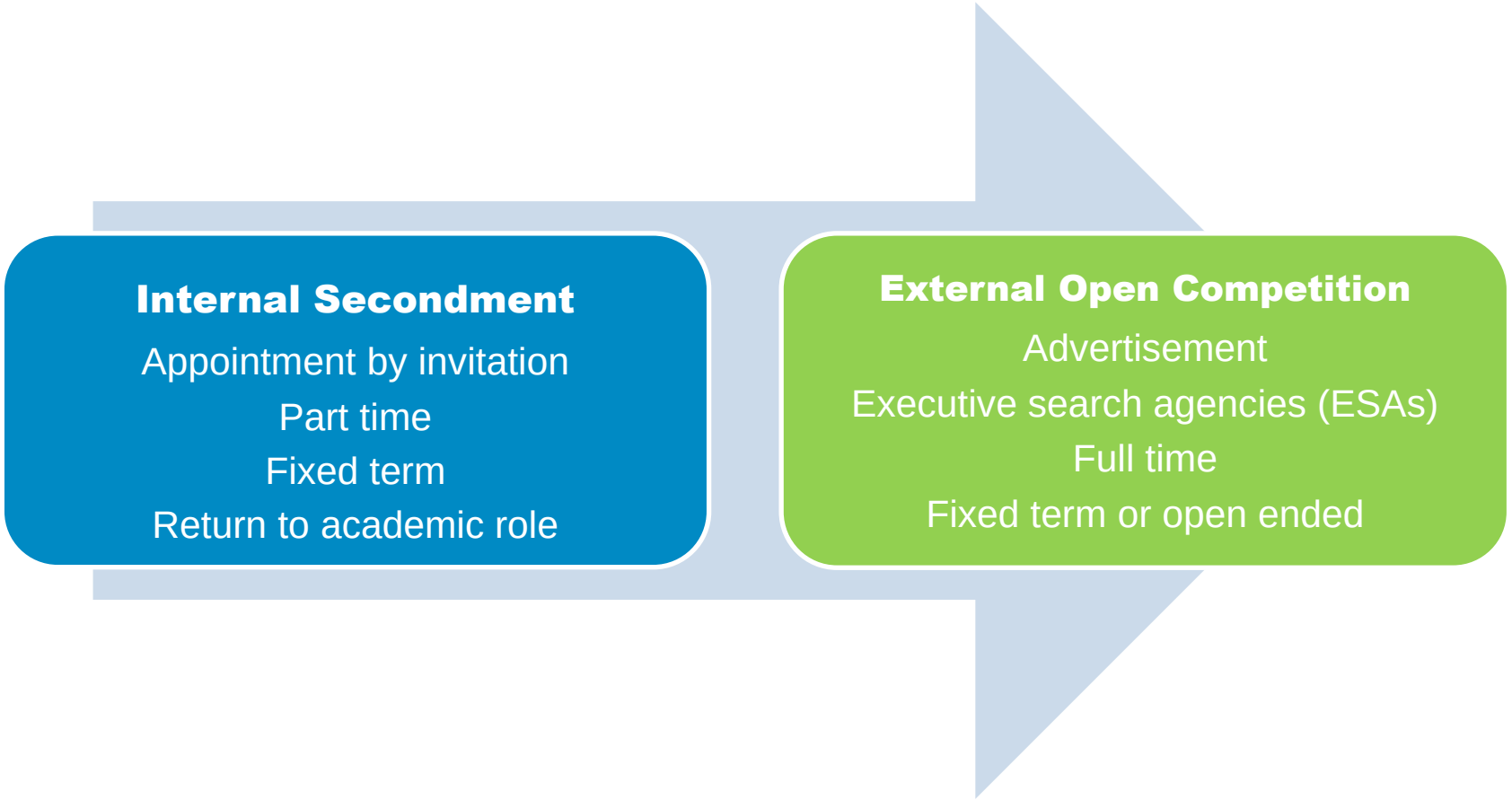
Changing PVC Appointment in Pre-92s



Research Questions

1. What are the drivers of, and motivations for, change to an external open competition PVC appointment model?

2. What are the implications of change for individuals' careers and for management capacity building?

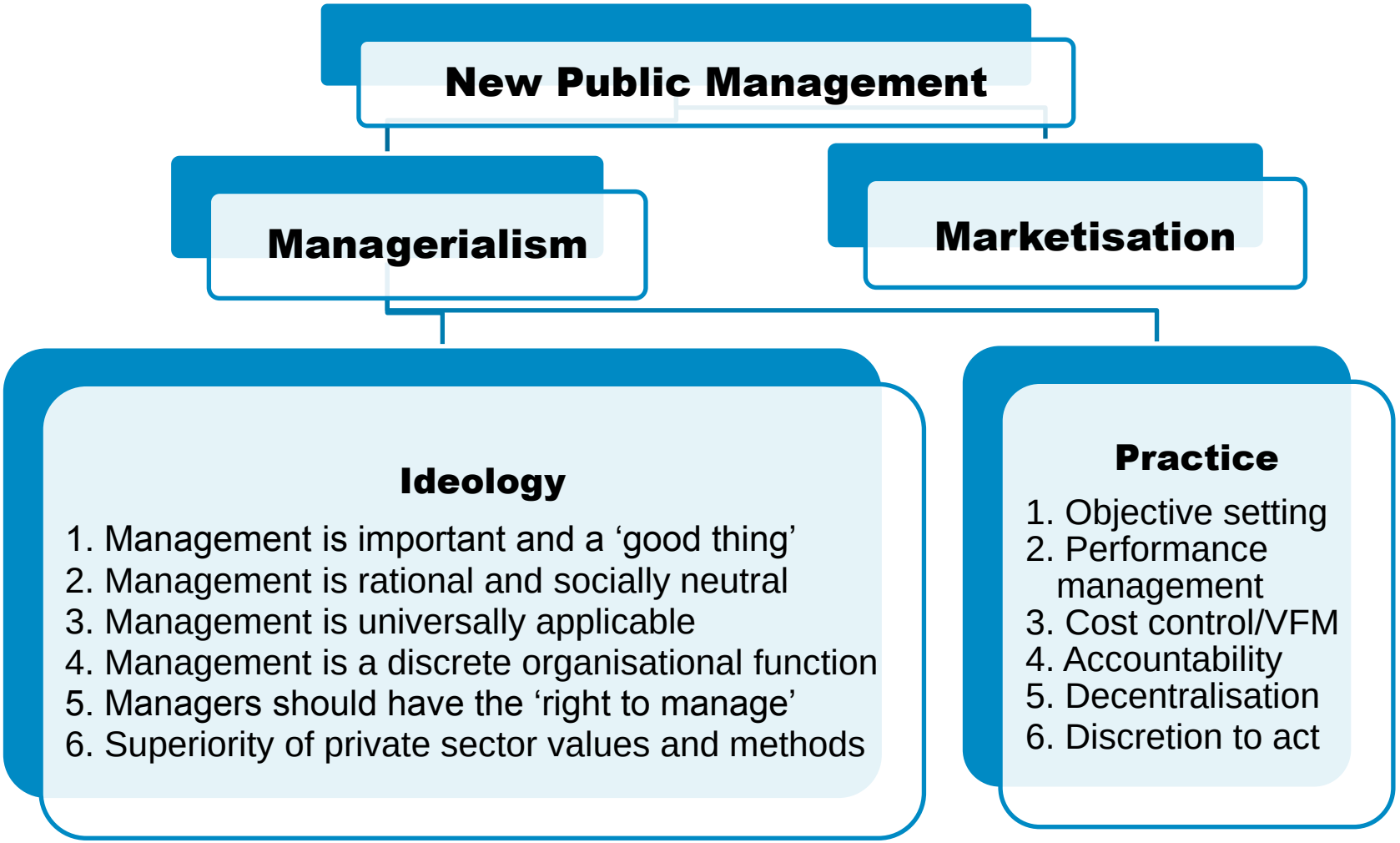
3. What is the theoretical significance of change for the notion of managerialism in a higher education context?

   This will involve consideration of the extent to which the findings:

   i. Are symptomatic of ideal-type managerialism

   ii. Support the prevailing academic narrative that academic authority is declining as managerial authority is increasing

Conceptual Framework



Clarke and Newman (1997); Farnham and Horton (1996); Ferlie *et al* (1996); Flynn (2002); Hood (1991); Pollitt (1990); Ranson and Stewart (1994)

Indicators of Ideal-Type Managerialism

Ideological Tenet/Claim	Implication for PVC Appointment
Management is important and ‘a good thing’	• Importance of PVC posts recognised • Priority given to recruitment and selection process as a means to attract the best candidates • A more managerial interpretation of the role • Managerial skills and experience emphasised in person specification • Value placed on management training

Data Collection

Sequential, mixed method design utilising multiple data sources

1. *Advertisement Monitoring Exercise (2006-2013)*
   - Adverts in THE and jobs.ac.uk for all EMT posts in English HEIs (n=414)
2. *Census* of PVC post holders (Aug 2012/3)
   - Snapshot in time. Publically available online data. Pre-92s. (n=215)
3. *Online survey* of 'next tier' post holders (Nov 2012)
   - Identifiable next tier managers – academic and PS - whose email address could be found. Pre-92s (n=132)
4. *Semi-structured interviews* (May-Nov 2013)
   - Purposive sample of VCs, PVCs, Registrars and next tier managers in those pre-92s that have advertised externally and ESAs active in HE. Mainly face-to-face. Respondent validated (n=73)

Drivers and Motivations for Change

Contextual drivers:

- More complex and challenging HE environment means university management more complex and challenging and so is PVC role
- University management perceived as increasingly important

Motivations:

- To reach a wider pool of better qualified candidates
- To bring in fresh blood/ideas/challenge and fill internal skills gap
- To test internal candidates against the field and 'validate' them
- To drive through a change agenda or tackle underperformance
- *To increase diversity of the senior team*
- *To improve/rationalise appointment practice*
- *To get people who really want the job*

Outcomes: Individual Careers

Current PVCs:

- Made an active decision to take academic management route
- Ambitious: many aspire to be a VC
- Increased personal risk for post holders
- “Going back” to academic role neither feasible nor desirable

Next tier managers:

- Women don’t lack ambition: equally likely as men to apply for a PVC post in future (38%)
- Smaller proportion of women applied for PVC post at another institution (5% v 16%); less gender gap at own (8% v 12%)
- Door is firmly closed to PS Directors and they know it
- Much less likely to apply; only one actual application

Outcomes: Management Capacity

- Creation of PVC recruitment ‘market’ and “competitive waiting room” of candidates (Watson 2008)
- Widening, but little diversification, of the candidate pool
- Little change to overall PVC profile: predominantly white (96%), male (76%) professors (90%)
- External appointees are a *less* diverse group (15% v 28%)
- No more likely to come from outside HE or be non-academics
- Main criteria remain academic achievement and credibility
- Recirculation of existing PVCs (39% v 22%)
- Safer, more conservative appointment decisions
- Temptation to ‘buy in’ rather than nurture home-grown talent

Tentative Conclusions

- Deficit case for change; pragmatism rather than policy
- Continuity in PVC profile disguises underlying change
- Emergence of a cadre of ‘career’ PVCs replacing ‘reluctant’ or ‘good citizen’ managers (Deem *et al* 2007)
- PS managers are an invisible group
- Structural issues for women
- Temptation to blame ESAs for lack of diversity in appointments, but universities cannot outsource responsibility
- Hard to conclude an improvement in management capacity, i.e. increase in the likelihood that the ‘best’ candidates will be attracted and appointed from the widest possible talent pool

Tentative Theory Development

- Some evidence of indicators of managerialism
- Not ideal-type managerialism, which holds that management is universally applicable or ‘generic’, but rather a context-specific ‘academic’ variant
- Belief that PVCs should be academics remains undimmed and there is clear evidence of professional/occupational closure
- So, rather than a diminution of academic/professional authority, may be an assertion of it, albeit by a few ‘elite’ professionals
- Continued predominance of academics as PVCs may be a *defence* against the incursion of a generic form of managerialism and/or general managers (perceived to be gaining in power)
- Academic narrative about managerialism: part myth, part reality?

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