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Celia Whitchurch *Reconstructing Identities in Higher Education: The Rise of 'Third Space' Professionals* (Society for Research into Higher Education, Routledge, 2013)

There is a story, no doubt apocryphal, of a former registrar of a large civic university who, whilst shaving in the morning, used to look into the mirror and say to himself "I know I am evil but am I a necessary evil?". Well times have changed and not all registrars shave in the morning.

The question 'who are we and are we doing any good?' lurks in the background of Celia Whitchurch's classification of different types of professional support staff working in a HEIs. Much of her work to date is described in this publication. Whitchurch's particular focus is the development of a 'third space' between 'traditional' (my shorthand description not hers) support roles and academic ones. This 'third space' is one increasingly populated by staff undertaking a diverse range of projects including student welfare, widening participation, learning support, community partnerships and business engagement. The skills and attributes required are different from generalist or specialist management and administrative functions. The staff working in the 'third space' may be drawn from academic or administered backgrounds. Frequently they will be working in multi-disciplinary teams and they will be engaging directly with learning, research and engagement activities rather than providing 'only' a support service. So this is a brave new developing space with more opportunities for creativity and more risks. As Whitchurch notes:

Such staff are likely to work collaboratively in multi-professional teams, with memberships drawn from inside and outside their institution, and spend time in outreach or off-campus settings. Their roles may not fit neatly into existing organisation or career structures, and although hierarchal line relationships continue to exist, these may be less significant in day-to-day working than lateral networks that can be activated at short notice. (p4)

The bulk of the book is an analysis of the views of 42 'third space' respondents across three different countries (Australia, UK and USA). It provides a conceptual framework for 'third space professionals' working in the interface between administrative and academic, functions and projects, with both internal and external partners.

The labels 'academic' or 'non-academic' or even 'support' seems too stark – the boundaries have been blurred. It is another important example of the increasing complexity and diversity of institutional management. We are not even sure whose side some staff are on, ours or theirs!

There can though be no doubt that this is a thorough analysis of a complex phenomenon and is, very firmly, an 'academic' publication rather than any form of 'how to' manual. I cannot say read this and it will change the way you work but it may help anyone who has a management role in a university understand one of the more enterprising organisational developments of the last twenty years.

Critically the activities in the third space are intended to add "...value that reinforces academic agendas." (p140). This includes undertaking tasks that might traditionally have been performed only by academic staff including curriculum design and pastoral care. So third space professionals do no evil and can provide a positive good. But for me, since I know that I do not occupy a third space, I guess I will have to keep on shaving.

John Hogan
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