

Collegiality in the University and in Akademos

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Introduction

Collegiality is a founding principle of Akademos.¹ It is indeed something ‘precious’ as many have said,² but something which, alas, has been lost almost entirely (save for small pockets of resistance) from the culture of public universities.³ Neither collegiality’s value, nor its loss in the university, will be news to members and friends of Akademos. Although the existence of collegiality in universities was nearly always constrained by hierarchical and non-collegial systems of governance and communication, it was treasured by those who chose to work and think collegially, and treasured no less highly than other principles central to the ideal of a university – regard for truth, scholarship, freedom, advancement and sharing of learning, and the public good. We see now how collegiality’s erosion by managerialism has brought under threat *all* of those principles – not an intended consequence perhaps (let us be charitable), but an inevitable one. Others have documented the managerialist decline of universities into something less worthy of that name, and have analysed the dynamics of this decline.⁴ I shall rather be concerned with the nature and manifestations of collegiality itself, particularly the living interrelation of its three aspects – as governance, community, and creativity – a holism which applies no less to collegial aims, practices and characteristics, than it does to the values which inspire them. It is this which is the source of collegial creativity, which distinguishes a culture of collegiality from one of mere sociability in academia, and which distinguishes collegial (self-)governance from mere sociable *laissez faire*. It may seem strange that the idea of collegiality should need to be defended against such gross confusions, but strange or not, it is necessary. Insufficient attention to collegiality’s holism, insufficient understanding of its character as an *integrated* expression of important values, has led many of its proponents (including universities which still advertise a commitment collegial values) to recommend it in the vaguest or most superficial of terms, and its detractors likewise to oppose it superficially or

¹ Although the term ‘collegial’ is used only once in Appendix 2, Part 2, ‘Aims and Objectives’, of the ‘Rules of Akademos Co-operative Ltd’, Akademos’ stated aims and objectives elaborate in detail the values of community, freedom, autonomy, democracy and responsibility which are the basis of collegiality, and the forms of practice which both embody and promote those values in higher education and in the wider community. See the Akademos website: www.akademos.org.au

² See for example: G. Baldwin, ‘First among Peers: An Essay on Academic Leadership’, *HERDSA News*, Vol. 18, 1996, pp. 6-9; Margaret Thornton, ‘Governing the Corporatised Academy’, edited version of a talk presented at the Second Annual Conference of the Association for the Public University, *Transforming the Australian University*, Melbourne, 8-9 December, 2001, (accessible from the Akademos website: www.akademos.org.au).

³ Margaret Thornton, *op. cit.*

⁴ E.g. *ibid.*; see also David Young and Jenni Goricanec, ‘From Resignation to Active Adaptation – Confronting the Managerialist Pathology in Universities’, paper presented at the Second Annual Conference of the Association for the Public University, Melbourne, 8-9 December, 2001, (accessible from the Akademos website: www.akademos.org.au). For an extensive bibliography see ‘Collegiality-Managerialism’, <http://oxcheps.new.ox.ac.uk/bibliography/d.htm>

confusedly.⁵

My aim is to give a clearer idea of what collegiality is, and what it is not, so as to be able to show why it is valuable, and to better understand its dynamics as they are embodied (diminishingly) in universities and (more centrally and more thoroughly) in such an organisation as Akademos.⁶ While I especially want to focus on the *possibilities* which collegiality opens up for our educational practice, I think it is crucial that I first clarify what it is, and combat the confusions and distortions which have led to misunderstanding and devaluing of collegial academic culture.

What collegiality is, and what it is not

Collegiality is an academic culture with three interrelated aspects: (self-)governance, community and creativity. Collegial governance is collective self-governance, where every member of an organisation is able to participate in the framing of its general policy and particular decisions, and where responsibility for these decisions and their implementation is collectively held. In practice, collegiality may fall well short of this ideal of participatory democracy and yet remain precious, as it was in university schools and departments whose self-governance was hierarchically constrained within the broader structures of the university. It is much more fully exemplified in Akademos, where open discussion, open communication, and open participation in collective policy-making and decision-making are the principles and practice of our co-operative. Nonetheless, Akademos operates under constraints imposed by the Co-operatives Act, laws relating to privacy, and so forth. For example, we are legally required to have a board of directors, in whom resides legal responsibility for the actions of the Akademos Co-operative Ltd. However, governance of Akademos comes as close to the ideal of collegiality as seems possible under the laws of the land as they apply to an organisation devoted to providing and transforming tertiary education – although, as a young and pioneering organisation, we are still learning the ways of such thoroughgoing participatory democracy, and (thereby) the creative possibilities open to an educational co-operative which is collegial through and through.

In whatever measure collegial governance is to be found within an educational organisation, in like measure is a culture of collegial community and collegial creativity possible for it. And where there is such creatively collegial community, there is high regard for collegial governance. We know these things because we know what has been lost in universities under managerialism, and how it was lost.⁷ The collegial spirit was broken by university managers making collegial governance impossible almost everywhere, and by their restricting communication between levels of administrative hierarchy, thereby preventing effective dialogue. The outcome has been diminished community, diminished responsibility, and diminished creativity within the university.

⁵ A web-search on ‘collegiality’ reveals the extent of this vagueness, misunderstanding and superficiality.

⁶ Collegial principles flourish also in socially innovative *co-operative* universities. See Race Mathews, ‘Making the Break: Co-operative Options for Scholarly Autonomy’, paper presented at the Second Annual Conference of the Association for the Public University, Melbourne, 8-9 December, 2001, (accessible from the Akademos website: www.akademos.org.au).

⁷ See Margaret Thornton, *op. cit.*, and David Young and Jenni Goricanec, *op. cit.*

There is an “organic” relationship between the three aspects of collegiality: governance, community, and creativity. I say this meaning firstly that they cannot be imposed upon an organisation, either separately or together, or externally “engineered” into it, but rather emerge through processes of “growth” from tendencies already inherent in its history;⁸ and secondly that they are complexly interdependent, as are processes of growth and development in living things. To understand them is to understand collegiality holistically. I shall expand on this theme of the holism of collegiality, as I respond to a number of objections which increasingly are directed against the idea of collegial governance in higher education.

It has been alleged against collegiality that it is an ineffective mode of governance, a slow, uncertain, and inefficient way of arriving at policy and decisions and of implementing them, and (despite the appeal of its values of democracy and community) an indulgent luxury which can be ill-afforded by institutions of higher education in these straitened, globally competitive, rapidly changing times. We all know the joke: ‘Managing academics is like herding cats’. It is quite funny, and is so because we seem to recognise some truth in it. As an argument – which is how the joke is typically employed⁹ – it is often taken to be decisive, or at least to summarise a decisive case for top-down imposition of policy, and managerial control of its implementation. Like cats, academics are taken to be totally absorbed in their own individual projects, jealous of their autonomy and freedom, self-sufficient, even secretive, and too narrowly focussed to identify, much less to prioritise and actively serve to satisfy in co-ordination with others, the wider needs and imperatives of the organisation which houses them. Such is the view from above, the view of managers who may never have experienced, and certainly have never understood, collegiality in the academy. For it is odd, isn’t it, that academics bewail the passing of collegiality – of community, collaboration, and mutuality – while managers speak of herding cats. What is going on here?

Several things are going on. First, there has been on the side of academics a surrender to, and on that of university managers an embracing of, the ideology of life as a market in which, at every level of organisation, each competes with all, and over which cost-benefit analysis reigns supreme. Associated with this ideology is a false consciousness of self and community – essentially Descartes’ notion of a self, conceptualised as radically independent of any community of others. As H. Peter Steeves puts it:

The disconnected, unattached, isolated Cartesian Self is, basically, the classical Liberal Self. It is autonomous and self-interested. It needs a reason – usually a social contract – to relate to Others. It sees Goods in the world as isolated, abstract, and ahistorical.¹⁰

However, to understand community, and hence collegiality, as involving an aggregation of such selves is a radical error. For as Steeves notes, drawing upon

⁸ The history of Akademos itself exemplifies such a process of “organic” emergence of a collegial organisation. This history is documented on the Akademos website: www.akademos.org.au

⁹ It is also used by academics as an expression (misconceived, I think) of resistance to being herded.

¹⁰ H. Peter Steeves, ‘A Communitarian Foundation for Schools: Phenomenology and the Ends of Education’, *Proceedings of Conference on Values in Higher Education. Ethics and the College Curriculum: Teaching and Moral Responsibility*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, April 11-13, 1996, <http://web.utk.edu/~unistudy/ethics96/hps.html>

Husserl, we never experience either ourselves, or others, or the world, in this way.¹¹ [The disconnected, unattached, isolated Cartesian Self, or classical Liberal Self] ... is fundamentally different from the phenomenological/Husserlian Self which is social and communally-interested. It needs no initial push into society for it already and only exists in the context of a community. It sees Goods in the world as intermeshed, intertwined, and essentially intersubjective, for if there is no isolated, egoistic, monadic Self then there are no isolated, egoistic, monadic Goods to be pursued. Consequently, we have reason to believe that the Liberal model of the Self is misdirected, and we thus set in its place a more communitarian model instead.¹²

Self is experienced as enmeshed in a mutuality, an intersubjectivity of selves. And this is how it must be understood: for if it is not, then either it is conceived as a self among objects, or (even worse) it is treated as an object among objects, and in either case community is impossible.¹³ The ‘classical Liberal Self’ is worse than a fiction (or a “simplifying theoretical idealisation”): it is a falsehood; and so too is any notion of community, or market imperative, or educational process or organisation, or public good, which relies upon it. In surrendering to this fiction and false consciousness, academics have misrepresented both themselves and their collegiality, and have effectively delivered themselves up to the ‘herding cats’ type of argument. Well, we are not cats – we are not radically disconnected Cartesian or classical Liberal selves – and by recognising this we may also avoid being sheep who are helplessly penned in the enclosed former commons of the academy!

Another factor in the misunderstanding of collegiality is failure to recognise that its aspects as community and as creative milieu are inextricably related to its character as a form of (self-)governance. Such misunderstanding is not to be found only among university managers and those distant from the university’s work of education and research. I quote below from Paul Ramsden, a distinguished educational theorist, who is rightly admired for his work on teaching and learning, and whose work also on *Learning to Lead in Higher Education* (from which these quotations are taken) has much to offer Australian universities. However, Ramsden misunderstands collegiality, and in particular misunderstands its dynamics as a culture:

‘Collegiality’ is an idea that has been made to do duty for an extraordinary range of valued academic processes.... It has acquired an iconic meaning related to values of unselfish collaboration among small groups of scholars. It may be better for our purposes to concentrate on its more restricted meaning as a form of shared decision-making. Collegiality is closely related to ideas of individual academic freedom, disciplines as frames of reference, separation from external pressures, conservation of special knowledge, and academic professionalism ... But it is represented in concrete practice in the form of numerous university committees which arrive at decisions through discussion and debate.

The benefits of collegiality relate to the sense of community and ownership

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960, pp. 17, 20, 24, 25, 98, 99, 107, 121, 129.

¹² H. Peter Steeves, *ibid.*

¹³ I have been much too brief here to do justice either to Steeves or to Husserl. The reader is referred to these sources. Points closely related to Husserl’s are made by other major phenomenologists.

which it gives all academics, senior and junior, over their joint affairs ...¹⁴

I shall pause for a moment to make several remarks. First, it is noteworthy that Ramsden refuses to consider the possibility that the aspects of collegiality he has opted not to discuss might be as important as those he considers. Second, he has in effect denied without argument the possibility that collegiality might not be largely a mere aggregation of characteristics and practices that academics are loath to lose, but might rather be something whose aspects are more intimately and systematically related. (The hint, in the sentence ‘Collegiality is closely related to ...’, towards possible systematic relationships, is nowhere followed up in Ramsden’s subsequent discussion.) Third, his alleged paradigm of collegial practice – the university committee – cannot be accepted unqualified: some university committees function collegially, many do not; in many, procedural restrictions inhibit collegiality, while in some, expectations of deference to authority stifle free discussion and decision-making; and very few are, or ever were, wholly collegial. Moreover, the selection of just one paradigmatic example of collegiality in practice – and that the most formal (contrasting with the informality of the greater part of collegiality) – further biases his subsequent discussion. These oversights and distortions turn out to be crucial to Ramsden’s unfavourable judgement upon collegiality, which he now proceeds to deliver:

Collegiality has come under pressure from mass higher education because its weaknesses are more evident in a system where there are more decisions to be made and where quick responses to external changes are at a premium. It is a slow form of decision-making. It is intrinsically inward-looking. Its procedures are unwieldy. It exudes an air of protective self-interest. To succeed, it demands among other things a group of people who are individually committed to excellence and equally capable of realising it. A higher education system whose institutions need to search for new funding sources, plan strategically, and compete with each other in a market with manifold clients no longer possesses the homogeneity and stability which can make collegiality an effective form of getting things done.

... [Collegiality] is one of those models which is fine in theory but has often not been applied in practice.... it has the potential to disempower, marginalise, and injure staff who are not part of the favoured group ... [and for] important political decisions in academic contexts ... [to be] typically arrived at by a small cadre of decision-makers. The committee often provides a veneer alone. And one only has to study the operations of university committees candidly from within to see that manipulation and craftiness frequently dominate over open, consensual decision-making, and that it takes courage and even foolhardiness to question the chair’s authority....

Academics tend towards criticism, scepticism, and sometimes destructive negativism. Collegiality allows these attitudes and behaviours free rein.... Collegiality can be used by the unscrupulous to block all progress.... Moreover the process allows individuals to evade responsibility, leading to situations where actions agreed upon by a group are not taken and no one is

¹⁴ Paul Ramsden, *Learning to Lead in Higher Education*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 22-23.

clearly to blame for not taking them.¹⁵

Ramsden's criticisms of collegiality are not born of unreflective or doctrinaire managerialism, and call for serious responses. And they call for response particularly from Akademos, since (even disregarding the question of what to include as features of collegiality) they seem to imply that Akademos' avowed aims, principles and practices are unrealistic, probably self-defeating, open the way for discriminatory and intimidatory practices, are highly vulnerable to sabotage, and are utterly at the mercy of external conditions; and that even at best they would require improbably high levels of excellence and dedication in Akademos' members to carry any of them through.

Curiously though, Ramsden's own solution to the challenges facing institutions of higher education involves the harnessing of collaborative endeavour, or as he prefers to call it, 'teamwork', but teamwork in which each team works with, and under a leader whose authority is legitimated from above, and whose forward-looking 'vision' is to guide the team's tasks, responsibilities and timeframes. In Ramsden's vision of the university, managers, leaders and teams (of collaborative 'followers') each have their essential roles to play in the success of the university's adaptation to difficult and swiftly changing circumstances.¹⁶ It is collegiality, not collaboration, which he thinks is the luxury higher education can ill afford. In the collaboration of teamwork (overseen and expedited hierarchically), he thinks all of the defensible advantages of collegiality can be had, while its (alleged) disadvantages of ineffective governance, untimely performance, vulnerability to perversion and subversion, and lack of focus, may be avoided. I don't dispute that Australian universities would be improved by embracing the more thorough culture of leadership and teamwork that Ramsden outlines and recommends, but I think the improvement would be greater were collegiality better understood and encouraged likewise, as a community spirit or culture permeating not only teamwork, but leadership and management also.

I shall deal first with Ramsden's criticisms that collegial systems of governance are highly vulnerable to subversion of their aims and tasks, and to perversion of their practices.

As I have mentioned already, by making the officially convened university committee his paradigm of collegial interaction, Ramsden has excluded most of collegiality, and so ignores most of its benefits. But his objection here concerns alleged costs or disadvantages of collegiality. I should first say this. "Railroaded" committees, "horror" committees, bullying or bullied committees, nasty committees, hectored committees, are all in some way dysfunctional, and are so because of the reprehensible, unprofessional and unethical behaviour of one or more persons who seek to control the committee or to stifle its discussion. Such behaviour is not in the least collegial, and does not spring from collegial motives. But that was not Ramsden's point; rather, he suggests that collegial committees lay themselves open to such perversion and subversion of process, and have no effective defence against them. In the case of extreme bullying or "railroading" from above, he may be right: for it may be that *no* committee, collegial or otherwise, is able to properly perform its functions in so hostile an environment; but a committee whose members are united by

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapters 5-11.

principles of collegiality, including those of academic freedom and autonomy, mutual support, and collective legitimation, will hold out longer than most. So only cases of subversion or perversion from within need be considered. But with regard to these, Ramsden totally ignores the dynamics of individual and collective collegial motivation. This is largely because he has selected the committee as *the* site of collegiality in governance. For where the committee *is* (all there is of) “collegiality”, there are no informal collegial processes to support, motivate, or facilitate in-committee collegiality. *Of course* in-committee collegiality will be fragile if that, effectively, is all the collegiality there is. *Collegiality is a culture!* and needs to be understood holistically. But the perversions and subversions of committee process which Ramsden mentions, are to be understood quite differently. These cases are symptoms of a malaise for which collegiality is most certainly not to blame, and which in fact shows that in *these* committees collegiality is effectively lacking or absent. For there is clear evidence in all that the tasks and processes in hand are *not* “owned” or felt to be owned by (a majority, or even a significant minority of) the committee members: if they were, and if there were accordingly any sort of collegial committee atmosphere, anyone attempting to subvert or delay something that a sufficient number of committee members felt they collectively “owned”, would be much more effectively dealt with. Of course, it might be that a rogue committee-member (perhaps a chair) is known to be ready to harm the professional reputation or prospects of committee opponents. In this case, a committee might bow to pressure whether or not it has a significant collegial membership; but again, we might expect that a collegial spirit would allow a committee to resist bullying or threat better than most, and in a communal spirit to cope better than most with any subsequent malicious acts by the bully. But where an offending committee member was not so dealt with, what is shown is that this allegedly collegial group was *not* self-governing, did not feel that it had been accorded, or was capable of securing, responsibility for its own direction and destiny, was not sufficiently committed to democratic processes, and was not indeed collegial. Honesty is not impugned by the existence of thieves; neither is collegiality impugned by pointing to cases in which it is absent.

Ramsden seems to blame collegiality for things uncollegial in three ways: claiming (as we have seen) first that it tends to degenerate into undesirable practices in committee, and second that in committee it is defenceless against undesirable tactics; I have rebutted these allegations. However, his next claim, that collegiality ‘is one of those models which is fine in theory but has often not been applied in practice’, is somewhat odder. For if collegiality really does seem ‘fine in theory’, then might it not be better that this theory be *more often* ‘applied in practice’, or that it be *more thoroughly* ‘applied in practice’? But this aside, Ramsden appears to be blaming the collegial ‘model’ itself for the infrequency of its being applied. Why could this be? Perhaps it is because he thinks that in being ‘applied’ it tends to be short-lived because of backsliding and degeneration into the earlier-alleged undesirable practices. I have already rebutted his arguments there, and will leave that matter. For what really catches my eye is Ramsden’s talk of ‘applying’ the theoretical ‘model’ of collegiality.

Collegiality cannot be ‘applied’; it can be encouraged and enabled, it can be *lived*, and in this sense it is a ‘model’ for academic *life*, it can be “embraced” (as something to live up to), but it cannot be ‘applied’ – the way a new organisational structure, or a set of recommended procedures, or a model of professional training might be applied.

Collegiality is based in a set of values for professional life; one can inculcate and promote values, and one can live according to them, but one does not ‘apply’ them. Rather, one “lives” them, and in doing so “applies” oneself in their service.

While I believe I have shown that Ramsden has misunderstood and misrepresented collegiality, I have yet to answer his objections that it is too slow a form of decision-making, too inward-looking, too unwieldy in its procedures and overly protective of self-interest, or that it may marginalise some participants, lead to avoidance of responsibility, and demand unrealistically high levels of excellence in its practitioners if it is to succeed. My response has two parts, and while both rejoinders need to be made, my case for collegiality relies only on the second of them.

First I would suggest that Ramsden’s misunderstanding of the nature of collegiality cannot but have contaminated his evidence: it will have led him to misidentify as collegial, some cases which were not: cases which were not motivated by, and did not evince, collegial values. I say this is likely, and I think my discussion both above, and later in the paper when I discuss Ramsden’s misunderstanding in more detail, suffices to show this likelihood, but obviously I cannot prove that such misidentification did in fact occur, so I will proceed to my second line of response.

Here, I accept that cases do occur in which collegial decision-making *is* ineffective, slow, inward-looking, unwieldy, or self-interested, or in which some participants are marginalised, or responsibility is avoided. These are all serious faults. The question is: can collegial decision-making *avoid* these faults, and if so, how readily?

The last two of these faults may be avoided by *more* collegiality, and *more thorough* collegiality. If collegiality is truly based in values of community, mutuality, and participatory democracy, then marginalisation of participants in decision-making will be contrary to these values and hence less likely to occur, and certainly will be less likely in collegial settings than it is in uncollegial circumstances. As to ensuring the proper taking of responsibility in, and for, collegial decision-making and implementation of decisions, my response to Ramsden’s objection is to refer to the solution which he himself mentions as one of the virtues of collegiality, namely the feeling of “ownership” which is engendered in participants in collegial processes. If decision-making, and decisions made, are “owned” by the decision-makers – and they will be, when decision-making is thoroughly collegial – responsibility for the process and its outcomes will be appropriately felt and acknowledged, and its requirements fulfilled. Moreover, if any are remiss or behindhand in fulfilment of their responsibilities (collegially agreed upon), the other “owners” will be motivated (by their collective “ownership” of the process) to encourage them or hurry them along, or if necessary to (collegially) reassign the task. Neither of my responses here to Ramsden’s objections is hypothetical. This *is* how collegial groups in which I am fortunate enough to participate, or to have participated in the past, have been able to avoid or to remedy the problems he mentions.

This brings us finally to Ramsden’s major objections to collegiality: that its decision-making is slow, uncertain, unwieldy, ineffective, inward-looking, unresponsive to a changing environment, unduly self-interested, and thus utterly inappropriate to the straitened, rapidly changing circumstances of higher education today. It is no adequate answer to point out that universities in Australia have done worse without

collegiality than they might have done with it, although this does need to be mentioned. For example, a culture of collegiality would have prevented the expensive failures of the private entrepreneurial arms which a number of public universities established and kept hidden from proper scrutiny either by the public or their universities. Here I am not referring to cases in which entrepreneurial activity was integrated with the activities of the university in teaching and/or research, or with developing synergistic links with industry – some of these ventures have failed also, but they are more honourable failures, which have not been without benefits to the universities concerned. Rather I mean the ill-considered ventures in which incompetent plotters hastily and secretively dropped their universities into the very top of the bubble economy of 1998-2000, with little regard for principles of effective business management or risk management, and still less for those of proper governance of a public university. Likewise, a culture of collegiality embracing both financial management and academic leadership might also have prevented the much more disastrous financial failure of another major public university, which, as a result of high-level management incompetence and absence of effective and timely consultation, risk analysis, and scrutiny, has for some time been operating while insolvent (were it a business, it would have been legally required to cease trading), to the great detriment of its students, its teaching, and its formerly proud reputation.

But this is not how I would defend or promote collegiality (for the culture of leadership, vision, and teamwork which Ramsden advocates, could likewise have prevented those shameful departures from proper university governance). I would rather tackle Ramsden's objections head-on. In essence, my response is that *all* of the problems Ramsden mentions for collegiality are *already* avoidable or soluble, by collegial means fully consistent with collegiality's fundamental values of community, professional collaboration, mutuality, freedom, and participatory democracy. Collegial groups, through careful collaborative reflection on their goals and practices, have devised and implemented their own collegial ways of evading or escaping such difficulties without compromising either their principles, projects or timeframes. However, no one need rely on my word or on anecdotal evidence for this, since there are well-documented, well-studied, reliable techniques which may be (and have been) adapted to just such occasions. For every one of the problems Ramsden mentions, collegially appropriate avoidance strategies and solutions are *known*, are known to *work*, are *readily implementable*, have been (and continue to be) systematically investigated, tested, refined in practice, and articulated in detail, and are conceptualisable within several theoretical frameworks for understanding complex systems and their environments, thereby contributing to an understanding not only of the complex holism of collegiality and participatory democracy, but also the complexity of their external environments and their interrelations with those environments. I quote from Merrelyn Emery's Introduction to *Participative Design for Participative Democracy*, a work which brings together decades of research and successful practice in designing interventions which enable groups to produce their own timely and effective solutions and preventative strategies for the sorts of problems which Ramsden raises:

The two main methods we have designed and progressively developed, the Participative Design Workshop and the Search Conference are different but overlapping forms. Both were conceived within and derived from the same set of concepts and principles; those which comprise *Open Systems Thinking* (Emery F, 1969, 1981). The Participative Design Workshop's specific

purpose is to achieve structural organizational change and participant's learning of how to achieve it. The Search Conference is designed as an alternative to elitist and optimizing planning and specifically includes appraisal of the extended social field and its changes.

By virtue of this element and its inherently democratic processes and discourse, it is highly effective for almost any form of planning, policy making or future oriented activity. Any group coming together around a common purpose can practice in the participative democratic mode ...

Democratic principles and mechanisms are also as feasible vertically as they are horizontally. There are no good reasons why we should not have organizations in every sector comprised of non dominant hierarchies of functions (objectives) where participative democracy is comprehensively practised, replacing the various autocratic and representative structures.¹⁷

The methods outlined in that book (and elsewhere) are successful because not only do they allow participants to "own" the process and its outcomes, but they fully utilise participants' expert knowledge in their own fields and workplaces, under direction of their *own* relevant values. These general methods may be (and have been) adopted, and adapted, for virtually any sort of organisation – industrial, educational, commercial, or administrative – and do not require an initially collegial or democratically participative setting, but rather engender such a setting. As I said, these methods have been tried and tested, developed and refined. They work. (The Search Conference has been successfully used in the foundation of Akademos itself.) Their general framework of practice, evaluation and refinement is that of Action Research,¹⁸ a framework which has been successfully used in educational projects in Australia and elsewhere.¹⁹ Less formally, related methods have been used by higher education collegial project groups to produce timely, responsive, and successful solutions to problems which these groups themselves have identified and located within broader considerations of policy. (This is how Akademos functions.)

Finally, given that readily implementable collegial solutions, and strategies for prevention, exist for all of the problems identified by Ramsden, his further objection, that successful collegial decision-making and implementation would require improbably high levels of excellence and dedication in its collegial practitioners (i.e.

¹⁷ Merrelyn Emery, 'Introduction' (to the 1989 Edition), *Participative Design for Participative Democracy*, Revised and Updated, 1993, ed. Merrelyn Emery, Canberra: Centre for Continuing Education, The Australian National University, p. 10. See also F. Emery, *Open Systems Thinking*, (2 vols), Penguin, 1981.

¹⁸ See Merrelyn Emery, ed., *op. cit.* I realise that Ramsden has reservations concerning Action Research in educational theory, as expressed for example at several places in his 'Theories of Learning and Teaching and the Practice of Excellence in Higher Education', *Higher Education Research and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1993, pp. 87-97, however those reservations seem not to be relevant in the present case, since the particular methods and strategies I have referred to may also be fruitfully conceptualised in terms other than those of Open Systems Theory which gave them birth, for example in terms of hierarchy theory, a scientific approach which satisfies Ramsden's condition of explanatory open-endedness, so this cannot be regarded as a case of Action Research "collapsing" a formal theory "into common sense" (see *ibid.*, p. 94).

¹⁹ See e.g. David Young and Jenni Goricanec, *op. cit.*; and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, 'Improving Learning and Teaching Through Action Learning and Action Research', *Higher Education Research and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1993, pp. 45-58.

to overcome collegiality's alleged shortcomings), simply falls away. It should come as no surprise, then, that it is possible for successful collegial universities to exist in these changing times – and so they do: most notably innovative co-operative universities such as Mondragon in Basque Spain.²⁰ Collegiality works. And collegiality is important because it is the integrated expression of a nexus of important values.

So how could Ramsden have got it so wrong? I believe there is a straightforward explanation: he has conflated collegiality with a culture simply of sociability and social co-operation. People may be sociable, and may co-operate, for all kinds of reasons: out of politeness; in friendship; from love of humanity; merely out of habit; for enjoyment of company; to gain power over others; from fear of loneliness; in search of sexual opportunity; to be esteemed by others; for comfort in times of anxiety, trouble or danger; to work with someone or a group, or to work better with them; to aid and comfort others; to curry favour or otherwise gain personal advantage; to relieve boredom; to learn what others are thinking or know; to share gossip; to cheat others or take what is theirs; to practice or develop “social skills”; and so on. Some of these motives may conduce towards collegiality, others certainly do not, and some might neither aid nor hinder collegial relations. All might be present in a university department, or be implicated in the dynamics of a university committee. A surface of sociability, even of co-operation, is no guarantee of collegiality. Indeed, as Kathy Emmett Bohstedt points out, the culture of academic autonomy which has been typical of university teaching and research may itself militate against the communal spirit necessary for a collegial milieu:

In a culture of autonomy, academic freedom is construed as full claim to individual rights, including the right to be free of supervision, evaluation, or even peer review of teaching. It is the right to insist that one's own judgment is definitive, and thus to be unfettered by unchosen obligations to one's students, one's institution, or even to society as a whole.²¹

A climate in which academic freedom, autonomy, and responsibility are understood merely in terms of such individual rights, will tend toward the ills of governance that Ramsden mistakenly lays to the blame of collegiality; and a surface of sociability and even of (self-interested) co-operation, with its multitude of possible motivations, will offer little or no resistance to this tendency. The ills of governance with which Ramsden mistakenly associates collegiality might be summarised as those of a system of *laissez faire*; and he appears to falsely conflate collegial forms of governance with what we might term mere sociable *laissez faire*.²² It is the latter which is subject to the failures and shortcomings he notes, and he is quite right to castigate it; for of course *laissez faire* is not an acceptable option for a university in a changing social

²⁰ Race Mathews, *op. cit.*; for more detail, see Race Mathews, *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society*, Sydney: Pluto Press, 1999, (and London: Comerford and Miller, 1999).

²¹ Kathy Emmett Bohstedt, 'Showing Up Sober isn't Enough: The culture of Autonomy and the Culture of Community', *Proceedings of Conference on Values in Higher Education. Ethics and the College Curriculum: Teaching and Moral Responsibility*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, April 11-13, 1996, <http://web.utk.edu/~unistudy/ethics96/hps.html>

²² See e.g. Paul Ramsden, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32, where, following McNay, he assumes that collegial governance is characterised by 'loose' policy definition and 'loose' control of implementation. This characterisation simply is not true of Akademos, nor need it be true of the (self-)governance of other collegial groups. It is illegitimate to assume that 'tight' policy definition and 'tight' control of implementation are possible only top-downwards.

and economic environment (and probably never was in any environment). Moreover, as Bohstedt stresses in her critique of traditionally individualistic university culture:

This rights-driven culture of autonomy leaves out some important moral dimensions of academic life. In our culture there are explicit expectations concerning the quantity of one's publications, but none concerning their subject-matter, or interest, or contribution to the common good. There are explicit expectations concerning the number of publications we must have in refereed journals, but none concerning the quality of one's teaching or the conscientiousness with which one approaches one's relationships to students. There are no serious discussions at tenure time about service to the department, the institution, or the profession; one is expected to be an outstanding researcher as defined by one's professional peers, and a competent teacher. We are explicitly told not to sexually harass our students and colleagues, but we are not enjoined to be kind or even polite to them, or even to give them the time of day when that would eat into one's precious research time. There are explicit expectations about what counts as "research," but not about what counts as "scholarship." Yet the scholarships of integration, application and teaching are as valuable to a free society as the scholarship of discovery....²³

But sociable *laissez faire* was never the source of the collegial creativity for whose return many long. Nor was it ever the source of the *spirit of community*, or the mutual inspiration which characterises collegial relations, and which indeed is the only remedy for the moral and professional shortcomings mentioned by Bohstedt. Just as participative democracy must be contrasted with *laissez faire*,²⁴ so too, and for the same reasons, must genuine collegiality be contrasted with *laissez faire*. Nor are collegial relations any more likely to degenerate into *laissez faire* than are other forms of governance and production, and they are much less likely to than is the individualistic, rights-focussed culture traditionally associated with the notions of academic autonomy and freedom. Perhaps it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between collegiality and *laissez faire*, especially as a group's dynamics may involve both, but there are reliable marks of genuine collegiality: collective "ownership" of process and outcome by those involved, collaborative creativity, inclusiveness, mutuality, and participatory democracy. If these are present, there is collegiality.

To further counter the distortions of Ramsden's account, I think it is worth looking in more detail at characteristics typical of collegial relations and collegial forms of governance, especially as these are all features which, if "modelled" and encouraged, will facilitate collegiality and increase its benefits. Glenda C. Rakes and Thomas A. Rakes list the following characteristics of collaborative or collegial organisations:²⁵

Collaborative organisations:

- are flexible, making much use of temporary committees, and easily shifting departmental lines;
- show readiness to change and depart from tradition.

²³ Kathy Emmett Bohstedt, *op. cit.*

²⁴ See Merrelyn Emery, ed., *op. cit.*

²⁵ Glenda C. Rakes and Thomas A. Rakes, 'Encouraging Faculty Collegiality', *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, <http://www.nationalforum.com/RAKESas.html> I have adapted the list from the table in which it appears in their paper, which is in turn adapted from M.S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1990.

Their communication climate:

- is people-centred;
- is caring, warm, informal, trusting;
- exhibits open flow and easy access;
- is multidirectional;
- is characterised by expression of feeling;
- involves frequent interaction;
- exhibits generational equity;
- is supportive.

Their leadership:

- encourages faculty [i.e. member] creativity and productivity through supportive use of power;
- is willing to experiment and take risks, and to treat errors as learning experiences;
- emphasises faculty [i.e. member] development;
- exhibits interdependency, and institutes an open system of resource sharing;
- has a high tolerance for ambiguity.

Their decision-making and policy-making are characterised by:

- relevant participation by all affected;
- collaboration, both in policy-making and policy execution;
- decision-making through problem-solving;
- decisions being treated as hypotheses to be tested.

We may recognise all of these features in Akademos. However, we must remember that they emerge *from* the principles of a collegial organisation. They are not merely a set of attributes which it would be “nice for an organisation to have”, but are rather integrally related within the living whole which is a culture of collegiality.

I have pursued at some length these various responses to Ramsden’s criticisms of collegiality for several reasons. First, because he raises serious objections which, if sustainable, would have cast in doubt not only the prospects for Akademos, but the role of collegiality in higher education generally. In answering all of these criticisms I have aimed to show how collegiality in higher education is a strength, not a weakness, and that solution of the difficulties of higher education today requires more collegiality, and more thorough collegiality, not less.²⁶ Second, I have used these responses to develop the theme of the holism of collegiality’s three aspects – as governance, community, and creativity – and in this way to (begin to) explain it as a culture, and to distinguish it from mere academic sociability, merely self-interested co-operation, and sociable *laissez faire*. And finally, in explaining how collegiality is able to overcome the problems mentioned by Ramsden, I have introduced discussion of the opportunities which collegial processes and a collegial culture open up for identifying, understanding, and solving difficulties which face higher education today, and for creatively devising more effective and more relevant forms of education. I shall conclude by enlarging on this theme.

Some further opportunities which collegiality makes possible

²⁶ I hope is clear that I think that a high degree of collegiality, properly understood, is not merely consistent with Ramsden’s recommendations for higher education, but is properly required by them. See also notes 27 and 28 below.

Here we might best begin with what is most important, that is, with learning and learners – which includes not only our students, but ourselves. In a collegial culture we learn from each other. Of course, we learn from each other – including historical others, and others we may not even know of – whether or not we live collegially, and even if we live as though we were radically disconnected Cartesian selves. But in this case the extent to which we learn from others may be obscured from us by individualistic false consciousness, as will also be obscured the extent of our correlative obligation to others to facilitate *their* learning. A collegial culture enables us to recognise both our debt to others for our learning, and the extent of our obligation – or as I would rather put it here, our opportunity – to contribute to theirs.

I'd like to illustrate this with an example. While I've been drafting this paper I've been thinking about a structural problem which has arisen in a number of subjects taught at my university. The university has instituted a policy of 'flexible learning', such that it should be possible for a student to pursue studies in a subject in different ways, and which applies particularly to subjects which are taught not only through tutorials, workshops, or seminars, but in which teaching is done also through lectures. It is now university policy, firstly, that lecture material be available online from subject web-pages in advance of the lecture, so that students may choose whichever form best suits their learning preferences, and secondly, that lectures be used to 'enhance' the learning of students who attend them, which I take to mean at least that the lecture should not merely repeat the online material. This is not a bad idea, but it has led to a (predictable) problem. Lecture attendance in subjects that supply sufficiently extensive and detailed material on their web-sites prior to the lecture has fallen off considerably – even in subjects where a large proportion of students previously found lectures interesting and stimulating (but now can satisfy their interest by reading the material on the web-site). For me the problem has four parts: (1) how do I ensure that students who don't attend lectures realise that lectures include something not available from the web-site? (2) how do I make the lecture sufficiently different from the online material, so as not to bore students who have already read it but are interested enough to attend, while still "covering" all of that online material? (3) how do I use the lecture for 'enhancement' of learning, without disadvantaging students (the ones who quite legitimately, and conformably with the policy of 'flexible learning', choose not to attend) by presenting important 'enhancements' not to be found on the web-site? and (4) how do I make the lectures (which I try to run as interactively as I can, and which students who attend still generally seem to find stimulating and worthwhile) more attractive to a larger number of students? (Discontinuing the use of lectures is not an option: it is School policy that they be used in first-year subjects.)

Obviously the four parts of the problem are closely related, and I'd been puzzling unsuccessfully over them for quite some time. However, I suppose that being engaged in writing a paper on collegiality got me at last thinking collegially about the problem (if only I'd done it twelve months ago!). It's not just my problem (as the teacher), it's my students' problem too: maybe we can solve it together, *if* I show greater regard for students by allowing them more opportunity for collegial "ownership" of the subject. Students could decide, through discussion in tutorials, what I should be 'enhancing' in the following week's lecture: what they thought they needed to understand but didn't, what they would like to be followed up, what may have caught their fancy or fired their imaginations, and what I'd covered inadequately

and needed to do again (maybe from a different angle). I'd still be able to discuss in lectures what I thought was especially important (and that would be covered on the web-site too) but I could relate that (where possible) to what students wanted me to discuss. If they wanted something that was beyond me, or that I couldn't adequately prepare in the time available to me, I'd tell them, and they could suggest something else. If they wanted something that I could clarify quickly then and there in the tutorial, all the better, I'd handle it immediately. Students would be able to feel some sort of "ownership" of this process and of some of the lecture content, and maybe more might come to lectures. If they chose not to, they would at least have an idea of what they were missing, and have been able to make an informed choice. And even if lecture attendance did not rise appreciably, there would still be all of the other benefits: more discussion of puzzling ideas and difficult theories in tutorials, more opportunity in tutorials for everyone to get involved (group discussion could precede plenary discussion of proposals for the next week's lecture 'enhancements'), more feedback for me on how things were going in the subject, more learning in areas that students felt was relevant, greater student "ownership" of the subject and their learning in it, greater respect shown for students by me their teacher, and in general more *active* learning for all of us. So I'll give it a try.

What especially struck me when I had this idea – apart from my thinking how obvious it was, and wondering why I hadn't thought of it earlier – was that this range of potential benefits could flow from just *one* change: collegially giving students opportunities to collaboratively decide what was important to them, and my agreeing to be guided in my teaching by their decision. How can something so obvious and simple present such a range of opportunity? The answer, I think, lies in the *holism* of practices and values that comprise collegiality: genuinely collegial practices cannot but have wider implications and wider potential benefits. A second thing struck me also. The potential solution which I had arrived at by thinking collegially, was an idea which I might instead have come up with had I been wondering how to encourage and enable *deeper learning* in my students – that is, learning which aims at active *understanding* rather than superficial memorising.²⁷ Reflecting further on past cases in which I had been looking for teaching strategies to promote a deeper, more active approach to learning, I realised that in most the strategy I'd decided on was in fact one of extending greater collegiality to students (although that was not how I thought of it at the time). Likewise, in books on teaching and learning in higher education, many of the ways discussed for facilitating deeper student learning can be viewed in this way.²⁸

These relationships are no accident, but they are more complex than I have space to investigate here. However, here is another opportunity which is opened up by commitment to collegiality in higher education: the opportunity to investigate from the perspectives of collegiality's underlying values, what can make learning more effective and more valuable. (Such investigation is under way in Akademos.) So by instituting more collegial relations with our students, not only may we facilitate their deeper, more meaningful learning, as we extend to them (and they to us) the respect

²⁷ On the distinction between 'deep' and 'shallow' learning, see J.B. Biggs, 'Individual Differences in Study Processes and the Quality of Learning Outcomes', *Higher Education*, Vol. 8, 1979, pp. 381-394. See also note 28 below.

²⁸ See for example, Paul Ramsden, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

and benefits of collegial values, but we become better able to understand our practice as facilitators of learning, and our lives as learners ourselves.

I could go on, and I trust that I will, but not here.

Concluding remarks

I have offered an appreciation, explication, and defence of collegiality, and of its possibilities for Akademos and for higher education generally. I've also explained why I think involvement in such an organisation as Akademos is something to be treasured. The living principle of Akademos, which integrates its educational values and shapes their expression in practice, is collegiality, and it is this which makes possible education viewed as a shared 'spiritual' activity of a community which values both learning and freedom. Such was the understanding of W.F. von Humboldt, writing two centuries ago on the ideal of a university – an ideal which led to the founding of the University of Berlin, and which is inherent in the seed from which Akademos too has begun to grow –

Inasmuch as all such institutions [higher institutions of learning] can attain their purpose only by continual confrontation with the pure idea of learning, the principles ruling their administration are isolation [from interference by the state] and freedom. Since, however, human spiritual activity, like any other, only flourishes under cooperation ... the inward organization of these institutions must produce and maintain an uninterrupted cooperative spirit, one which again and again inspires its members, but inspires them without forcing them, and without specific intent to inspire.²⁹

Collegially (and scarcely otherwise than collegially) we may fulfil our responsibilities and pursue our visions as educators and as learners, and share the intrinsic rewards of such an ideal of higher education. As Kathy Emmett Bohstedt says:

What we stand to gain in return for fulfilling these responsibilities is extraordinary. We gain pride in our role, and respect for ourselves within our scholarly community and outside it... We gain an authoritative and respected intellectual position in society. Above all, we gain meaning. We could be proud members of the most precious microcosm of democracy our society has yet produced, whose collective values, goals and allegiances are known to all. The culture we create here is an experimental model of what we can imagine, what we can create as the best society that humans working together can achieve.³⁰

²⁹ W.F. von Humboldt, *Collected Works*, Vol. X, p. 250, trans. Marianne Cowan, in *An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt: Humanist Without Portfolio*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963.

³⁰ Kathy Emmett Bohstedt, *op. cit.*