



DEANS' MANIFESTO **CHARTING OUR JOURNEY**

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi
Prof. Paulann Grech
Prof. Alex Torpiano



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To the countless who supported us
– you have shaped our journey



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PREFACE

Prof. Paulann Grech

Faculty of Health Sciences

I had wished to start this Preface with an inspirational leadership quote. A quick online search resulted in an overwhelming selection of catchy phrases that invariably portray leaders as quasi-saints: the ones who always put others first as they perform their magic subtly but effectively. Going through these quotes makes leadership seem almost natural and effortless. Romantic, even. Then, the discussions I had been having with Prof. Andrew Azzopardi and Prof. Alex Torpiano, as we explored their experiences as Deans, sprang to my mind. At that moment, I realised that no quote could ever convey these two leaders' passion and determination as we explored their modus operandi, their triumphs and struggles, and all the good and bad that the Deanship journey entails.

As the stewards of academic institutions, Deans hold a unique position of influence and responsibility. In fact, it may seem as if the role description of a Dean is bursting at the seams. Our Deans have to act as the architects of their Faculty as they strive to create an environment where staff members and students co-exist peacefully and reach their goals. No mean feat!

This document, crafted with two esteemed Deans whose careers exemplify dedication to academic excellence and transformative leadership, stands as a beacon. As soon as Prof. Azzopardi shared his idea of documenting his and Prof. Torpiano's reflections on their Deanship journey, I knew this would serve a dual purpose. Primarily, the resulting Manifesto is meant to provide a glimpse into the role of the Dean and may be inspirational to those who aspire to fulfil this role one day. Additionally, it will be part of the legacy of the two Deans who feature in this work.

In this view, the Manifesto is more than a collection of thoughts and reflections: it offers a roadmap for navigating the complexities of a University structure. While they share the core principles that guided their leadership, they challenge us to rethink traditional paradigms, embrace inclusivity, and reflect on how to foster a culture of psychological safety.

This Monograph is designed as follows: a Preface by myself for each of the 11 themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews with the two Deans, a separate commentary by the Deans on that particular angle of their work, and an analytical piece by close collaborators.

As we scroll through this Manifesto, we are reminded that the future of a Faculty lies not only within the pre-set University structure and the procedures it dictates but also in the courageous efforts of those who dare to dream and act.

In conclusion, I have suddenly realised that while I had resorted to surfing the web in a desperate attempt to locate inspirational leadership quotes, I had inadvertently failed to realise that I have the most precious quotes of all – those uttered by my two colleagues who have been leading their faculties over the past years. So please join me in exploring their intriguing experiences, as shared in their own words.

With admiration and appreciation.



FOREWORD

Prof. Alfred Vella

Rector

In 2013, Forbes magazine ran an article to justify why being Rector of a university is probably the toughest job of all. If true (and I suspect it is), the reason for it is because tenured academics do not feel they need to be “led” or administered even if most of them detest administrative duties. And being told what to do is, to some, tantamount to denying the campus community its academic freedom!

Truly, leading a university is like trying to herd cats: one shouldn't try to “control” but to coax and cajole and slowly persuade. Without the patience of Job, it's a lost cause. Deans of faculties make the job easier and possibly possible for the stoic Rector, and some Deans are quite excellent in this role. In my view, both Alex Torpiano and Andrew Azzopardi were in this category of Faculty leaders.

Professor Torpiano had the foresight, wisdom, experience and, most importantly, perseverance to totally reform the programme of instruction leading to the profession of architecture and civil engineering. And this objective was a crying need for the Faculty and indeed the industry.

At the time, when I was still pro-Rector in charge of academic affairs, students would join a taxing five-year course and be trained to work as both architect and/or structural engineer which presented clear challenges and unfairly landed the graduates with a bachelor's award for their efforts. One added big problem was the fact that the school system did not provide students with an adequate educational preparation addressing graphic communication or design. These skills, crucial for the profession, needed to be somehow picked up or learnt during the course where not enough time and space was available in the lecture room, workshop or laboratory. Alex (and his team) split up the monolithic course into three parts leading to separate discrete awards: a one-year diploma where students learn graphics and design and the use of pencils as powerful communication tools; a three-year basic sciences bachelor degree and the final two years leading to a master in either architecture or engineering. In this manner, the University course of study became compliant with EU standards for this profession and the students were properly trained and better prepared for the demands of an important economic activity for Malta.

On top of this major undertaking, Alex also spearheaded a massive research project involving the building (with EU funds) of a multimillion euro construction which will house two faculties (including that of the built environment) and other university entities and laboratories and which is planned to have a near zero carbon energy footprint thanks to the materials employed and the architectural design. This building is nearly finished and shall be inaugurated later this year. It will be a fitting tribute to a formidable career of Dean Torpiano and I am so pleased to have collaborated with Alex on these projects.

Dean Andrew Azzopardi is cut from a different if still valuable fabric. A humanist at heart, Andrew is a people's person whose considerable work at the University seems to be an extension of his extramural persona rather than the other way around. He leads the Faculty for Social Wellbeing like a crusader rather than an administrator of disparate academics in fields as varied (but connected) as social work, disability studies, psychology and youth studies, and he readily adopts as much theatrics as needed to reach his goals. Senate will be more sedate and quieter but less thrilling without him.

Prof. Azzopardi embraced fully my vision for L-Universita' ta' Malta as our only precious civic-minded university. He agrees with me that our endeavours, including our pure and especially our applied research, should have Malta's problems and challenges as research foci. He demonstrates this firm belief by managing to convince multiple public and private actors as well as government and state agencies to commission and support research projects (sometimes with himself as lead investigator) engaging with pressing issues of Maltese society. Several master and doctoral candidates are currently pursuing studies, the results from which should improve quality of life or reveal dysfunctional situations hidden in the recesses of our social fabric that require fixing.

Andrew Azzopardi isn't satisfied with actions just happening in the lecture rooms, the research field, or in Faculty administration offices but he is also passionately committed towards the scholarship of outreach. This is an aspect of Andrew's work in which he excels and probably best defines him in Malta's society. Three characteristics should embody the work of any university academic: teaching and academic administration; original research; and outreach. Outreach is critical because the University is beholden to its several proximate publics who need it for improvement of their quality of life and who support it (wittingly or not) through their tax monies. Andrew is a consummate commentator and communicator who uses the print, radio and social media to get his message across. While I do not always share his views, especially those rather off the middle wavelengths of the spectrum, I definitely agree he should continue to engage with all cohorts in society using language that is easy to follow and pushing ideas that he considers beneficial and benign. I sincerely hope that many, many more of our 1000+ academics find the time and courage to espouse more audibly and responsibly the third scholarship of academe.

Alex Torpiano and Andrew Azzopardi represent some of our finest at Tal-Qroqq; may L-Universita' be fertile ground for the sprouting and flowering of such personalities for the good of our institution and our Malta.



INTRODUCTION

All good things must come to an end!

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

Faculty for Social Wellbeing

Prof. Alex Torpiano

Faculty for the Built Environment

What an incredible journey it has been!

We are immensely grateful for the experiences we have gained while leading our faculties.

Admittedly, it has not all been smooth sailing; we have faced our fair share of challenges. The opportunity to lead our faculties through some very complex and challenging local and international situations has also, in a way, provided us with the opportunity to contribute in becoming an essential loop in our social structure, where our faculties were indeed a '*fakulta' tat-triq - fakulta' tan-nies*'.

As we contemplated this Introduction, we agreed that one painting that we feel portrays the intricacies of our roles as Deans was that by Vincent van Gogh and his renowned oil painting, 'The Potato Eaters'. Tradition claims Vincent van Gogh created this work of art after devoting endless hours, days and months to spotting working-class families in and around the late eighteen hundred. Like in every piece of art, one would expect various interpretations, but one that seems to stand out is that this painting was attempting to re-create the social dynamics and also depicted poverty, pain and hard work but was fortified with hope that ordains itself in resilience.

This is essentially what we tried to do.

We tried to connect with human geography and 'used' our academic tools and weapons to fight the demons of exclusion, oppression, and inequality in our society and our environment. Although the two of us were on a separate mission, we contended with these realities in parallel.

At the risk of dramatising, being a Dean is not a walk in the park, far from easy, nothing new there. There are the hours one needs to put into work, the challenges as we wrestled with bureaucracy, the suffering that you have to share with your staff, and the endless grappling with lack of money and resources, to name a few challenges.

But even when the going got tough, we found solace in our colleagues, students, researchers, administrators and Ph.D. candidates, and we fought our way through the gregale.

But then again, we never lost sight of where we wanted to go, which is simply and clearly explained in a few words: 'a community where social justice prevails'.

As we lend you some of our experiences in this Monograph, ably led by our colleague Prof. Paulann Grech, the phenomenal artwork of the stencil artist Banksy is another inspiration. An incredible piece of work, simple as it comes, was created by an anonymous artist who, it seems, painted the original one in East London in 2002. This work depicts a girl trying to catch a heart-shaped balloon which is floating away. It is possibly Banksy's most iconic work but also a lesson we have carried in our minds throughout the years as we navigated through the challenges our role commanded. It is true that at times, it feels like we are losing our grip on things, but then again, that moment when we think all is gone, we are reminded that we will soon be turning a corner.

This painting, "The Girl with Balloon", is widely interpreted as a symbol of innocence, hope, and the fleeting nature of love and happiness. The red balloon, often associated with childhood and joy, is depicted slipping away from the girl's grasp, suggesting the ephemeral and transient nature of happiness and dreams. The piece has resonated with audiences around the world, evoking feelings of nostalgia, longing, and the desire to hold on to what is precious in life – possibly the story of our Deanships.

In the end, our journey as Deans may have come to an end, but the life lessons we have learned and the impact we hope to have made will endure, guiding our Faculties as they continue to strive for social justice and meaningful change.





STRATEGY SETTING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

WHAT DOES THE ROLE CONSIST OF?

At the University of Malta, the Dean plays a crucial role in the administration and leadership of the Faculty. Responsibilities may vary according to the structure and contemporary needs of the Faculty, but generally, the role encompasses strategy setting and implementation. This may involve maintaining existing structures whilst striving to bring about change by introducing innovative practices. In this view, Prof. Torpiano's main aim was to bring about a radical change within the Faculty in order to streamline it with the profession. On the other hand, Prof. Azzopardi's primary goals were to get the Faculty 'out there' and build a niche that creates the scholarship notion of 'social wellbeing', especially within the local context.

IN THEIR WORDS*

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

I wanted the Faculty to grow in texture and in profile.

In fact, one of the things that we did immediately was to publish books, a number of books, texts on social wellbeing. It was the first time that we had texts on social wellbeing that encompassed notions like quality of life, standard of living, happiness, to name a few. Now, we are planning our third, fourth, and fifth editions.

The concept of social wellbeing is seen as being vague, and it should remain vague. It should remain broad because what it does is that it brings into the

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I always saw my role as Dean primarily to transform the Faculty. Now, when I say 'change the Faculty' it was not simply in terms of a name. The Faculty was then called the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering, but there were a number of issues that needed to be addressed. We were clearly out of date. We had just two departments, which were not sufficiently representative of, let's say, all the branches of the profession.

So, I knew that I had to first and foremost tackle the issue of the core structure. I knew that meant changing the curriculum and the degree, so I knew where I had to go. Of course, it was not mapped out in my head, but I knew

**Note: Prof. Andrew Azzopardi & Prof. Alex Torpiano were interviewed by Prof. Paulann Grech in 2024 and these are excerpts from the transcript.*

fray components of happiness, quality of life, and standard of living. Now, suddenly, everyone is using the term 'social wellbeing' whether it is politicians, other faculties or other entities. I have no problem with this because some of these people were the same ones who used to make fun of the Faculty's name. In the process we also created a research magazine, *societas.expert*, which presented a space for academics to publish short pieces on a specific theme. Added to this we crafted our international journal, *Studies in Social Wellbeing*. We organised Brown Bag seminars and professorial lectures. All of this continued to promote the concept of social wellbeing, which nowadays is considered a scholarly field through the direct collaboration of our work as well. That was always my number one target!

...

People have become used to me by now. They know that driving my motivation is that of enhancing the Faculty profile and I will not let anyone come in the way. So, whilst I will, on the whole, abide by the rules, I do not have a problem with disobeying a bit for a good cause. For example, if an entity, like a local council, permits me to put up a banner to promote the Faculty, I will sidestep any bureaucracy and just put the banner up.

...

In addition, I invested a lot in giving life to each Manifesto I presented prior to my Deanship and transformed that into a strategy and workable plan for the Faculty which we developed as a group.

that this was the core objective, so that we would be in line with the profession in Europe, and be in sync with the international standards, thus providing access for our alumni to work abroad.

...

Over the first years, I guided the Faculty through a radical change. I changed the name of the Faculty, and the Rector agreed with my decision to do so after understanding my rationale. We started to restructure departments. We also had an Institute of Masonry and Construction research, which I had previously set up, and I brought that back to form another department, so then there were three departments. And then, because we were doing a lot of work on planning, because that is another important area of the Faculty's work, we soon had four departments. Now we have grown to eight.

...

Initially, I took on a lot of work, for instance, I chaired most of the boards of examiners because I wanted to set the way forward. Now I don't do it anymore. At the end of this term, 16 years down the line I don't need to do it anymore.

...

We also worked on having proper and realistic deadlines that allowed students to bring out the best of them.

...

I had a vision, and the plan evolved. I can't say that the plan was completely mine, but certainly, I did have a vision, and then people joined in, and we worked on a strategy. The detail of the plan came together by talking to the group and coming up with solutions. So, it is necessary for the Dean to have a vision, but they must be prepared to share that and in the process bring people on board.

...

I think you have to be clear on what you want to do as a Dean and to be honest with yourself. So, if you want to be a Dean because it would look nice on your CV, then think a bit about it. But if you want to be a Dean because there are some things you think you can do to improve, identify them and go for it. You have to have a vision of what you want to do and try to get people on board.

Remarks

Prof. Frank Bezzina,

UM Pro-Rector for International Development & Quality Assurance

As any other leadership role, that of a Dean is bound to be labelled by keywords like visionary, bold, resolute, reactionary and transformative. At the University of Malta, we take the case of two Deans who have taken their Faculty to new heights and exploited new opportunities for the benefit of their respective learners who in turn, became professionals in their own fields Prof. Andrew Azzopardi (Faculty for Social Wellbeing) and Prof. Alex Torpiano (Faculty for the Built Environment).

In both Faculties, “growth”, “change”, and “consistency” are common factors that define how the institutions moved from small outfits (possibly perceived as a cliché) to policy-impacting, research-led institutions that are changing the way audiences and lawmakers interact with the respective professions. In both cases, the respective Deans coached individuals to transform them into a proactive, closely-knit team of academics who can collaborate and work together to advance the profession with stakeholders for stakeholders and society. In both cases, the Deans had a vision, although not necessarily set out in a formalised plan. Both Deans were dynamic and charismatic in nature, helping them move their respective faculties through times of change. Although respectful of laws and the rules of the “game”, in both cases, the Dean did not shy away from being somewhat controversial (perhaps at the expense of eluding bureaucracy) to raise awareness and interest about contemporary issues and solutions.

In raising a Faculty’s profile, both Deans worked hard to make their respective faculties more visible to a diversity of publics. This change required investment of efforts ranging from purely academic and scientific events like lectures and seminars to mainstream media efforts on TV, radio, newsprint and social media largely in layman language. These efforts helped to project a new image or brand about the Faculty, a name that is well-defined and broad enough to involve an element of vagueness, yet clear enough to dissociate the profession and the Faculty from any prevailing stereotypes.

Moving with the times also meant that both Faculties needed to represent the profession or sector more acutely. Societies and economies change, and so do the professions and their standards as countries develop. Emerging standards and social/economic needs mean that tomorrow’s professionals need to co-create value in more effective ways, a statement that essentially defines a Faculty’s *raison d’être*. Faculties need to provide a learning experience that equips future professionals with the skills and competencies of tomorrow.

This last statement portrays succinctly what every Faculty’s strategy should seek to achieve.



CHAPTER 2

HAVING A ROBUST STRUCTURE

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE FACULTY'S STRUCTURE ON THE DEAN'S ROLE?

One of the basic successes for effectively running a Faculty arises from having a robust structure. This is pivotal for the efficient delivery of academic courses, administrative duties, research initiatives and the general organisation of work. Prof. Azzopardi and Prof. Torpiano emphasise the importance of working on the basic structure of the Faculty as one of the initial steps of the Deanship journey. In particular, they refer to the administrative structure and the Heads of Departments as vital building blocks of the Faculty. The importance of Deputy Deans and an active Research Team is also highlighted.

IN THEIR WORDS | ADMINISTRATION

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

My colleagues really helped me all along. They were my most precious resource, the people who worked closest to me. The Faculty Office, especially the Faculty Manager, and the team at the Office of the Dean and the Heads of Department were crucial in helping me lead this growing Faculty.

...

The mandatory work of a Faculty can be done in a reasonable time-frame if you have an efficient and diligent Faculty Manager like I had, good Heads of Department, a robust Faculty Office and an excellent PA. Having a good setup is of the essence. I was obviously very picky on who my Assistant would be

Prof. Alex Torpiano

Another thing I did when elected Dean was that I removed departmental secretaries in my Faculty. All the Faculty Administration is one office, the Faculty Officer, equipped to cater for the fact that our courses are interdisciplinary, so we do not really have departmental secretaries. I was lucky to have an excellent Faculty Manager.

...

I believe in this model, because the fact that we have a unified Faculty office, instead of separate departmental secretaries helps cross-departmental collaboration, and now they are all working together.

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as she was deceive when creating a structure. I also created a Dean's office, and a team worked closely with me on activities and events. So, once the structure was set up, the work, the day-to-day work of a Faculty progresses well.

...

For example, before a Faculty Board meeting, you need to complete a number of tasks. You need to have a Board of Studies, there are the forms that need filling and boxes we need to tick. The administrative bureaucratic structure works almost on its own. But you need to have a good internal (Faculty) system in place to complement it.

...

I have the Faculty Doctoral Committee run by an efficient administrator and the Faculty Manager. I have the Faculty Board chaired by myself but run by the Faculty Manager and a good administrator. If you have a good structure for Ph.D.s, a Faculty Ph.D. committee, then problems are tackled easily, and they don't necessarily and immediately end up on my lap. My Assistant, Charlene Fabri, is super efficient and exceptional on all grounds, but mostly as a critical voice. She provides me with feedback and guidance. The other administrative staff members who assist me are excellent, too. These are the ingredients for a robust Dean's Office.

IN THEIR WORDS | HEADS OF DEPARTMENT AND DEPUTY DEANS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

One of the greatest secrets to efficiency is a good working relationship with the Heads of Department. They are crucial and I always supported them notwithstanding I did not concur with every decision they took.

...

The College of Heads is a very important structure we set up. We meet regularly, and it is a valuable forum where, first of all, people have an opportunity to meet up because, as we always said, leadership can be rather lonely and secondly, we are never trained into leadership at UM, at least so far. For most of our Heads, it was the first time they had leadership roles. So, headship is, a learning curve as well, but apart from that, the College of Heads is a support mechanism, and through it, I got to know them inside and out.

...

Prof. Alex Torpiano

When I became Dean and we set up a new Departmental structure we had a quasi non-existent Faculty Board. Now we have a Faculty Board which is active, and I am proud to say that I now see that the Heads of Departments are working autonomously, without needing me, as they did at the beginning.

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When it comes to Deputy Deans, you need to choose people who know you well but who are not afraid to disagree with you and give their opinions. This is important because you need a good sounding board.

...

I was also always very lucky - the Deputy Deans were a massive support for me; Dr. Greta Darmanin Kissaun, Dr. Kristina Bettenzana, Dr. Gottfried Catania and Dr. Claire Azzopardi Lane. We loved and respected each other.

...

As leaders it was important that we meet often; we had Away Days, communicated, consulted with each other, and had an active WhatsApp group.

...

I also found a lot of comfort in my Heads of Department and my Deputy Deans when there were a number of on-the-ground and immediate issues that needed to be dealt with. I always found my Heads of Department to be very supportive of their staff whenever called for.

IN THEIR WORDS | RESEARCH TEAM

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

We had another very important structure at the Faculty set up. One of the things that I needed from the Rector was support to conduct research commissioned by the grassroots entities in the community. To help with this, I needed two full-time Research Support Officers, who were provided to me, after a bit of cajoling, as one would imagine!

...

Whilst I was always very lucky when it came to the quality of RSOs, unfortunately, there was turnover because the Research Support Officers only have a three-year contract. So, most of them would have already been preparing to leave during their second year.

Remarks

Dr. Colin Borg

UM Academic Registrar

The administrative set-up of a medium-sized higher education institution (by international standards) has to be solid in order to ensure that all initiatives and work are properly executed. Therefore, in my view, the administration of the University can be paralleled with an engine of a car that has to function in a laborious and elaborate manner. The work of any administrative official or a department or a unit cannot be analysed in isolation or in silos but part of a complex and an elaborate structure. The work of a modern University has to consider both the academic and administrative staff as a unified team which tries to manage complex tasks and situations. The philosophy has to be that division of lines is to be considered with caution as situations demand the effort from all those concerned. This is increasingly becoming the reality as tasks undertaken by administrative staff are now becoming more complex and demanding.

Structurally, throughout the years, the University of Malta established several management support units to manage effectively and as efficiently as possible. The set-up of the Project Support Office, a Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) and a Research Development Trust (RIDT), the Doctoral School and very recently the Office for Professional Academic Development (OPAD) are such examples. The University invested heavily in student services through several management support units. The investment in student service was a response to the changing student clientel . The recent establishment of the Help Hub functioned as a response to criticism in this area that there is no central unified Student Welfare Support Unit even though both institutions have high-level officials assigned to student welfare, a Pro-Rector and a Deputy Principal respectively. This one-stop-shop for students helps the University of Malta to coordinate the work of the Faculty's administrative staff, the Students' Advisory Services, the Office of the Registrar and within Faculties or Institutes, in line with UM's strategy.

From a purely employee perspective, four main HR developments can be observed. The first development centres around making jobs more managerially oriented rather than purely administrative of record taking. The second development relates to enhanced responsiveness and adaptiveness to the environment. The transformed job designations demonstrate this phenomenon through: the creation of child care jobs to highlight the societal focus on providing childcare to working mothers; information management specialists to emphasise the ICT managerial revolution prompted by the acquisition of software licences such as AIMS and SIMS, the former is the software that is used for managing staff and the latter to manage students' records; and the introduction of scientific officers, architects and civil engineers and a decontamination officer in order to respond better to the exigencies arising from the scientific world.



LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

WHICH LEADERSHIP SKILLS ARE NECESSARY FOR THE ROLE OF DEAN?

Deanship necessitates the continuous employment of leadership and communication skills. Prof. Azzopardi and Prof. Torpiano reflect on their preference for using a visionary leadership style that supports open communication, inclusive practices, and the promotion of psychological safety at the workplace and consider these as being pivotal elements that contributed significantly to their role.

IN THEIR WORDS | OPEN COMMUNICATION

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

If I intend to appoint people in certain roles, I do not simply approach that person and ask them if they would accept the role, such as the FREC chair or chair of the Faculty. The first step would be to discuss with the Heads of Department. The same applies when I wish to move an administrative staff member from one Department to another. Many times, when you have valid reasons, and you communicate and explain properly, the Heads will support you. This avoids creating conflict when there is an easier and less confrontational and more collaborative way of doing things.

...

Prof. Alex Torpiano

In the new course structure, we introduced a number of elective subjects. This can be tricky. I have had lecturers who complain that students did not choose their subjects as elective study units. I would say, "*Hold on a minute. Look back, think about what you are doing wrong because there must be a reason why students are not coming in.*" I have got some excellent lecturers in, for example, structural engineering and geo-technical engineering, very difficult subjects, but students choose their study-units, because they know that they are going to get the mentoring and support they need.

...

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How do I build working relationships? This is a complex question with a simple answer. You need to talk. You need to do it even if it takes time. For example, one way of doing this is that once a year I make it a point to invite staff (Administrative, Academic, Ph.D. candidates and RSOs) for informal chats. I've done that for each of the 8 years I have been Dean. I also have an open door policy for students.

...

To give another example I realised that the Departments needed help with research so apart from utilising our two Faculty RSOs to support the Departments when possible in this last year we recruited an RSO for each Department to help with Research. This was a successful scheme and also one that cost a lot of money, but that is the work of the Dean, understanding a need and addressing it.

Of course, there are still issues I'm not happy with. I make it a point to listen, and if necessary I will inform the person that they have to step up their game and that they should not be surprised if they do not get a promotion.

...

At the beginning of my Deanship, the Faculty and our courses were in bad shape, and a major review was needed. The first thing that I did was try to understand the situation, especially the weaknesses and strengths of our courses. To do this, I invited members of staff to give me their insights through a scoping exercise. Then, gradually, we started. I started to bring other members of staff on board so that we could discuss and implement changes.

...

It was needed, but when somebody disagreed with a plan or said it was not possible, then I told them, "*Now listen, ok, let's discuss - let's have a session to explore why it's not possible. Maybe it was an idea that we had tried and now would not really work. If so, let's change it. OK, let's change it.*"

...

I think I managed to create a rapport with all the academic and administrative staff. You need to keep at it until they come on board because, in the end, you have to work with them.

IN THEIR WORDS | EMPLOYING THE RIGHT SKILLS AT THE RIGHT TIME

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

I disliked only 15% of my role, and this is when I've had to take disciplinary action against students or members of staff. I try to do this as quickly, efficiently, and humanely as possible because disciplinary action is traumatic.

...

Sometimes, you do have to eat humble pie and take in grumbling and aggravation which maybe shouldn't be directed to you. But as a leader, you need to be sensitive to the fact that people are dealing with other things in their lives and so taking one for the team is fine.

...

Prof. Alex Torpiano

The Dean needs to move forward. I think one must push aside certain perceptions or negative feelings for example, towards a staff member. You must push it aside, because they are members of staff, and you have to understand why, they're not performing. At the same time, I think I was one of the first Deans to actually recommend that somebody's appointment is not to be extended; this is not an easy decision, but it can become a necessary one.

...

I've never been afraid of saying, "*look this is wrong and therefore we must change it*". I always made it a point to keep an ear to the ground.

...

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When I know I have bothered someone, I always do whatever it takes to rebuild bridges. Sometimes I manage, and sometimes I don't. But at least I know I have tried to find a solution.

...

If someone did something that bothered me, I would speak to the person. It is very important to speak up. I would explain to the person concerned. For example, if someone contacted me, for example, on a Sunday morning with a non-urgent request that could have easily waited till Monday, I would explain that I am entitled to my personal space too and that I would appreciate it if I am not contacted (on holiday) unless it is an urgent matter. But I would speak up. People know exactly where they stand with me.

...

I tried to avoid micro-managing. There were very few instances where I made major decisions without consulting with others. I mean, they are the people who run the show. I still think that trusting people is essential.

...

I think good leadership is about recognising when it is time to move on. When my Deanship ends, I will move to the sidelines. The new Dean will have to run the show because it is not good for them, and it wouldn't be good for me either to be around except to serve when called for.

The new Dean will need to be less invasive than I had to be at the beginning, but that was because I thought it was necessary at the time. I gave more space to the Departments when things started to work well, and I eventually took a step back. Now, I am only a reference point. If they have a problem, they come and discuss with me how to resolve it. The role of the Dean is to coordinate and to help when needed.

Remarks

Dr Natalie Kenely

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Policy & Social Work

Having served as a Head of Department myself, I understand firsthand the complexities of navigating academic leadership. Years of experience working with and coaching leaders across diverse contexts have further deepened my appreciation for the unique challenges and opportunities presented by academic leadership.

I find the reflections of Professors Azzopardi and Torpiano on their Deanship particularly insightful. They offer a compelling glimpse into the world of a Dean, revealing a role that demands constant attention to leadership and communication skills. Both professors paint a picture where visionary leadership goes hand-in-hand with open communication, a sense of belonging, and a workplace that feels safe for taking risks. They argue that these elements are the cornerstones of effective leadership and a thriving Faculty.

Prof. Azzopardi champions a consultative approach to decision-making, stressing the importance of garnering support from department heads before implementing significant changes. This highlights his understanding of the importance of conflict resolution and building consensus. His approach exemplifies a collaborative leadership style that prioritises dialogue and transparency, fostering trust and buy-in from key stakeholders. Furthermore, Prof. Azzopardi's emphasis on building working relationships through informal conversations reflects a deep understanding of the power of social capital within a Faculty. By prioritising open communication and accessibility, he cultivates an environment where staff feel heard, valued, and part of a team – and to this I can attest personally. This fosters a sense of belonging and psychological safety, crucial for innovation and knowledge sharing within academic departments.

Prof. Torpiano's reflections, on the other hand, delve into the domain of employee discipline, a sensitive but necessary aspect of leadership. His commitment to handling disciplinary actions with empathy and efficiency highlights his understanding of the human aspect of leadership. Prof. Torpiano's approach to addressing conflicts and providing constructive feedback underscores the importance of clear communication and mutual respect in professional relationships. By fostering a culture of open dialogue and holding everyone accountable, he creates an environment where issues can be addressed constructively and resolved effectively. This not only minimises conflict but also fosters a sense of professionalism and continuous improvement within the Faculty.

Both professors recognise the importance of empowering their teams through autonomy and trust. Prof. Azzopardi's emphasis on avoiding micromanagement and empowering staff to make decisions reflects a belief in the capabilities of his team members. This fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, leading to increased motivation and innovation. Similarly, Prof. Torpiano's acknowledgement of the importance of recognising when to step back and delegate responsibilities highlights his understanding of effective delegation and leadership succession. This ensures a smooth handover of knowledge and skills, promoting long-term stability within the Faculty.

In conclusion, the reflections of Professors Azzopardi and Torpiano offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of Deanship. They highlight the essential role of leadership and communication in fostering a positive, productive, and innovative academic environment. Their visionary leadership styles, grounded in empathy, inclusivity, and transparency, serve as exemplary models for aspiring leaders who seek to navigate the complexities of universities and propel them towards excellence.



CHAPTER 4

WORTHY CAUSES TO JUSTIFY ACTIONS

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

HOW DOES ONE JUSTIFY THE ACTIONS TAKEN?

Both Prof. Azzopardi and Prof. Torpiano state that a crucial factor is focusing on worthy causes. It is also important that colleagues are aware of these just causes as this potentially enhances their understanding of the actions taken by the Dean. This is also fundamental in gaining trust and commonly acts as a catalyst for effective leadership and to foster a positive impact within the Faculty.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

At a Faculty community, people have many different opinions on various issues. But one aspect that we all agree on, each with our own different interpretation, is 'social justice'.

...

NGO'S, voluntary organisations, governmental entities and private services are another important loop. The Faculty is part of this social fabric.

...

One of the ways I endeavoured to try and respond to the growing research needs in our community is to reach out for funds, not an easy thing in our sector but

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I think this is the secret of gaining people's trust: *'getting them to believe that you will not do anything to undermine them'*.

...

Some people later told me that they had originally not voted for me to become Dean, because they felt unsure about how I would treat them; but that they had then realised that what I was doing was the right thing. In many cases, if you simply push ahead and try to convince people that what you are trying to do is not a threat to them, but a different way of doing things that can benefit them, all those issues eventually disappear, and they join you on your bandwagon.

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over these last 5-6 years we managed to secure close to 1.7 million Euros worth of monies that were intended to help us with our research and with the democratising of our knowledge. We have also provided over 1000 tangible recommendations of social policy actions we can act on.

...

Our scholarship and research are available to the general public. In fact, we had over 70 projects delivered in 5-6 years. We also made it a point to grow the number of Ph.D. candidates to almost 110 (at various stages of their studies), managed to get the funding for 6 full-time Ph.D.s, developed a research fund, and secured 20,000 Euros for Masters' scholarships. This not to mention the hundreds of contributions on traditional & social media.

It was by showing people there was no ulterior motive in what I did, that was the secret. All these worries disappeared once people realise that there were no bad intentions. But you have to be extremely careful how to present ideas, democratically, clearly and by using the Faculty structures.

...

You have to be open to bringing people on board, but you have to make them understand that there is no threat to them. Mind you, I have never been afraid of telling anybody what was bothering me.

...

People were willing to help when I showed that I was serious about changing things. It started from the Rector, obviously. When the Rector saw that I was serious about leading the necessary transformations, he gave me his support, which was very important. Even the Pro-Rector in charge of the quality assurance of programs in PVC was also on my side.

...

So, at one point, my staff and I were setting up the curriculum of the Bachelor's degree, we had Master's programs which were also divided into two, and we also had study units within them that needed to be revamped. So it took a long time to align the curriculum as I wanted to. But, I was hell bent to implement the new program immediately so when I went to Rector Vella, I said I wanted to start making the necessary changes. Usually, the first time that a new program is reviewed by PVC, it takes a reasonably long time, but the Rectorate helped me by making it possible to kick start the new program as quickly as possible.

...

It is a matter of convincing people what lies at the heart of reform. Once they are convinced like you are, the changes start happening.

Remarks

Claudia Calleja

Journalist, Times of Malta

Leaders don't command – they inspire. And this 'inspiration' can be driven by sharing a worthy cause and involving people in working - together - towards it.

Life has taught me that, in most cases, people fear change. This especially applies to change at the workplace because any change can challenge 'the comfort zone'. But there are exceptions. Sometimes people are not 'comfortable' at work: they might dislike the way things are done or the way people are managed - resulting in them feeling demotivated or resentful even. This is when they may crave and need some form of change.

So they may end up torn between wanting change, but fearing it. After all, as the old adage says, 'better the devil you know'. This is where a good leader can make all the difference. In this case this leader is the Dean of a Faculty, whose role it is to not only direct the Faculty towards academic excellence, but guide and inspire staff to pull the same rope.

This leader would have lived the realities of the Faculty, can see the issues and opportunities for change. This leader also has a vision for the future but can understand human-nature and the people's apprehension towards having their work world rattled.

This is where communication – in the form of honest transparency – can go a long way. On some level, when a new leader is appointed, people expect some form of improvements or changes. While the new leader might have a clear vision of where she or he wants to head, involving the rest of the team will help get there more smoothly.

Keeping people out of the process may just cultivate an 'us versus them' mentality. Unclear goals may leave spaces for them to 'fill in the blanks' with incorrect theories and gossip. Having a clear vision that is communicated clearly and honestly puts the cards on the table. Communicating the 'why' behind that vision is vital.

As Andrew Azzopardi says, it is about democratization and this, as suggested by Alex Torpiano, goes in both directions: toward superiors and Faculty staff. As Torpiano continues, it is about showing there is no ulterior motive and that the ultimate goal is the best interest of the Faculty and its people: staff and students.

It is impossible to appease everyone. And a leader must be able to take decisions even if they are initially unpopular. But these decisions must be backed by a clear purpose. While not everyone might agree with the chosen path, they will at least know where it is coming from and so will the people around them. This reduces the chances of having toxic misinformation that can poison a project before it takes off.

Change can be uncomfortable. But if all the people involved in driving that change understand the vision and 'the cause', there is the space to cultivate a sense of belonging. And people who feel they belong are more likely to work to achieve a shared, worthy cause.





ACCESSIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

HOW CAN THE DEAN BE ACCESSIBLE?

Being a Dean involves managing a large influx of information and requests from various sources. In fact, as noted by Prof. Azzopardi and Prof. Torpiano, it means that you are always 'on the go', and so adhering to office hours is nowhere near realistic. The two Deans emphasise the need to be accessible so that staff members know that the Dean can be easily reached without the need to go through obstacles. Additionally, they feel that embodying timely responsiveness is essential for people to feel valued, heard and supported. However, this can be challenging in the midst of the Dean's hefty workload. This is when effective time-management skills become a vital need in a Dean's life.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

To me, it is very important to react to my staffs' needs as quickly and as expediently as possible. As a rule, I never leave any emails pending especially knowing well-enough that a query that may appear frivolous to me may be causing anxiety to the sender, and that person would be eagerly waiting for my reply. I am not implying that I have some kind of saintly dedication but simply emphasising that you have to be focused, dedicated, efficient and fast. I cannot imagine a Dean doing other things apart from being a Dean to be quite honest. The time you need to dedicate to this Office is immense and any other major commitment is sure to derail you. After the second year as Dean, I myself relinquished all consultancy and other roles

Prof. Alex Torpiano

If people wish to speak to me, they do not book an appointment with my Faculty Office. They just knock at my door. Sometimes it's a burden, I guess. If I am busy, I inform the person that I will deal with it a bit later.

...

I don't really like emails but I invite them to, if they want, to make an appointment by email with me directly. My Faculty Manager has no idea of my schedule.

...

How do I manage my time? Well, as one of my ex-students once said, I think you manage because you are there, because you love what you do.

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that were not purely academic or related to my area of scholarship or linked to my deanship.

...

This role is not a 9-to-5 job; it's ongoing, non-stop. It includes working on weekends and dealing with crises on Friday nights (because they seem to pop up on Friday evenings!).

...

I think the fact that you make yourself available makes people feel safe and at ease sharing the challenges we are facing with more courage. Weekend or not, public holiday or not, personal holiday trip or not, I always wanted my staff to feel that I can be called on at any time they need me. Thankfully, most did courteously and respectfully.

Remarks

Prof. Perit. Rebecca Dalli Gonzi

*Head of Department, Construction and Property Management,
Faculty for the Built Environment*

A Dean makes two cases on the topic of time: Either a time-commander or a slave of time. As soon as someone walks across you and waits for your attention, it might be seen as an engagement with you, your background, and your enthusiasm for the work. The moment one chooses you, is manifested as a Chronos or Kairos moment, or as I like to call it 'the opportune moment'. Academic life gives you some freedom to choose between becoming a commander through time or a slave to time. If I consider students to be the main audience, they want you for yourself — your look, your focused attention, your grace, and your introspective self. But, if you are a "slave" to all the other administrative demands, that moment in time is lost. Why? Because the student has fallen into yet 'another administrative task'.

Some Deans, in my opinion, have chosen otherwise and the ones included in this Monograph have demonstrated to be time-commanders. They have mastered a skillset whereby if a student takes up one's administrative time of the day, their goal has been to save one's future life, academic record, or otherwise; the truest gift they gave of themselves. Knowingly or unknowingly, we feel each other's energy. We know when our leader is speaking truthfully or intentionally seeking our well-being. We all naturally want to figure out each other, thus real leaders shine when they provide a sense of security for their team. They know that, even when disciplinary action is required, their welfare will always come first.

The essence of life lies in perceiving one another's circumstances and knowing that we can cover for each other to care for, assist, replace, or provide assistance; truly the joy of life is knowing someone has covered your back securely. If we learn to do it with our smallest vulnerable populations, it will surely come naturally to our employees, the community, and the sectors we serve. One of the most therapeutic experiences I have had is accompanying students on short walks around campus while we converse about their struggles or personal narratives. Trees, open areas, and our unofficial parks on Campus are strongholds and we can re-discover ourselves by returning to it each time we lose a sense of our being. Academic life can be daunting, but we have been fortunate to learn from our Deans that their innate care and concern has always come first; this is a lesson that is being transmitted to the next generation of leaders. It is with confidence and knowledge that I assert that a significant number of the teachings contained within this text will endure the test of time. Even in cases when time is of the essence, we believe that accessibility will always come first. We, as a cohort, have believed that our humanity has to win out always, especially with our students, and now, God willing, we will impart your vision.



CHAPTER 6



STUDENTS: THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP LIKE BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND THE DEAN?

Prof. Azzopardi and Prof. Torpiano are unanimously in agreement on the importance of students and their high place on the Dean's agenda. They emphasise that valuing students and listening to them is essential to fostering an enriching educational environment, especially since students are the ones who receive the academic efforts of the Faculty and are the scope of its existence.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

It is really important that students know that they are very precious and that every one of them matters. My relationship with students is very important. If I fall out with a staff member, it bothers me. However, if I have a problem with a student, it worries me.

...

I really like to meet students. Students give me the opportunity to let me into their lives. Once you get to know them, you realise the wealth they're made of. I've had students speaking to me about their experience of loneliness, others about eating-disorders and others about major problems in their families. My role as Dean and as an academic has always been to

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I take a strong interest in students. I see students as partners, because, their voice is important in a Faculty. I also say this because of my history with the student organization SACES. They tease me about it because I was one of two people who set up the student organization way back when I was a student.

...

Again, our relationship is based on trust and the students talk to me regularly. If an academic staff member is not performing, they tell me.

...

support them in every possible way. Whether they are Ph.D. candidates or students reading for a Diploma they all have my utmost support. I have also during these years randomly chosen a number of students who I have called to ask them how they're doing in their studies. Students are our core business. But it's not just about reaching out and recruiting them but also taking them under your wings and sharing their journey.

...

I have always said that the most intense and the strongest experience for me is when I am on the stage at that point 'sponsoring' their degrees during graduation and with just one look I see hundreds of students and their families looking happy, satisfied and rearing to go and change the World. That is the epitome of our work knowing well-enough that they have arrived there through our teaching but also because every member of my staff contributed to their personal, social and academic wellbeing.

...

The work that the student organisations have done is impeccable: CSA, BETAPSI, and SHS. I am also indebted to KSU, which in 2020, following the nomination of BETAPSI, awarded me 'My Favourite Professor Category' and again in 2024 gave me a special award to thank me for my contribution to students and Faculty. These are precious moments I will never erase from my memory.

...

On a number of occasions, we have invited KSU to our Faculty Board meetings to discuss issues we could work on together.

...

Every year I collected a Student Satisfactory Survey as that helped me gauge where I stand with students.

...

On a practical level as a Dean I encouraged regular dialogue with students, organised Dean's Fora to encourage debate, developed a number of special awards for students and alumni in the Dean's Award Ceremony, set up a program scholarship for students, started an *RSOI* scheme whereby students could spend a number of hours working closely with our Departments. A number of other initiatives like bringing service dogs to the study area during exam

It's all about students because without students, we wouldn't be here - a number of staff members tend to forget that. It is frustrating that some academics staff do not give enough attention to students as they prefer to focus on research.

...

Once, I told the Rector, "*Why don't you have an election with students? They will tell you who they think should be promoted. They will tell you who gives them attention, time, and support.*"

...

Student feedback works, but you have to make it obvious that they can trust you, as they are in a vulnerable position. If students are not sure that they are going to remain anonymous, they will not speak out. I had one case where comments were filled in about a specific lecturer, and I called him. His first reaction was that he would find out which student had given that feedback about him. That was beyond the point.

...

I believe a lot in members of staff remembering that they were students. I have taught all of them more or less, and I find the younger lecturers sometimes can be stricter, harder yes, and sometimes I tell them: "*Hold on a minute, I remember when you were a student!*" Sometimes, they come to me distressed that students haven't learned certain academic facts after 3 years. And so, I respond: "*If they don't know that after 3 years, then maybe that's our problem, not their problem.*" So that, to me, has always been very important.

...

The students respect me, I know they do. They respect me because of this. I think they feel as if they are participating actively in Faculty matters. Again, simple things, for example, before COVID-19, we used to have an open-door policy. Students had a card, and they could come in 24 hours a day, including weekends, and I said they could come into the Faculty. The University administration was a bit worried and wondered how this would work out and how we could control the situation. So, I said: "*OK, let us install CCTV so that if something happens, I will be able to know who was the culprit.*" We never looked at the cameras. I never had any problems except once. One party turned wild. So, I think the secret is that you trust them and then they trust you. We tried it here, and gave them 24-hour access and the results were for all to see. Then COVID-19 came, so we reshuffled the Faculty,

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months in collaboration with KSU and providing refreshments during a number of student activities.

...

As someone who believes in systems having structures in place is of the essence and that is why I pushed a lot to have students represented on Faculty Board, developed the weekly Digest newsletter to keep students and staff informed on what is happening, set up the Connect newsletter, had an academic anchor a program on Campus FM radio, designed and set up an SMS alert to inform students on initiatives.

...

Finally, plans and designs have been concluded so that our Faculty can have its own 'clubhouse', our Faculty building. The re-designing was centred on how to create spaces and resources that will make students more engaged in University life, better spaces to study and enjoy their time on Campus. Coincidentally, we will be moving into the Faculty for the Built Environment current building after they move out, hopefully in the coming years.

and somehow the administration felt a bit reluctant to go back to that. Recently, I asked for it again for the final years because the final years told me that they needed to come in to work together on their final project. I said: "OK, I will ask for it, but you have to promise to collaborate" - and I've never had any problems.

...

Once, the students had a party at the Faculty, and I wasn't here, and I told them: "Look..make sure that you clean up because it's not fair on cleaners." I was abroad then. After the party the students sent me photos to show me that they had really cleaned up everywhere to the best of their ability, and they wanted to show me the photos to reassure me that they had really done it.

...

So, I think it has to happen that way. You have to trust, and they will trust you.

Remarks

Jeremy Mifsud Bonnici

Former President, Kunsill Studenti Universitarji (KSU)

In the realm of academia, where policies, curriculum, and administrative decisions often dominate discussions, it's refreshing to witness a unified voice echoing the sentiment that students are at the heart of the educational enterprise. A notion that not many realise in the hustle and bustle of everyday academic life is that, while academics have numerous interactions with their students, for any given student, this interaction could be their only personal encounter with their Faculty. This interaction could set the tone for this student's future, their idea of the institution, Faculty, or the profession itself. This places a massive responsibility on anyone who pursues a vocation in academia.

Their unanimous agreement underscores a fundamental truth: without students, the very purpose of educational institutions would be nullified. Professors Torpiano and Azzopardi rightly assert that valuing students and actively listening to their voices should be paramount for any Faculty or administration aiming to cultivate a truly enriching learning environment. At the end of the day, students are consistently on the ground, be it from an infrastructural point of view or a workload point of view, and they ultimately shape the experience of university and academia.

Indeed, students are not merely recipients of academic efforts but the *raison d'être* of educational institutions. Their presence imbues vitality into the academic community, fuelling intellectual discourse, innovation, and progress. Ignoring their perspectives or failing to prioritise their needs would be tantamount to disregarding the essence of education itself.

In essence Prof. Torpiano and Prof. Azzopardi's stance serves as a guiding beacon for all educators and administrators, reminding them that student-centric approaches are not just preferable but imperative. By placing students at the forefront of their agenda, faculties can ensure that their educational endeavours are not only effective but also meaningful and transformative.

As the President of the student union, it's incumbent upon us to echo and uphold this principle, advocating tirelessly for policies and initiatives that prioritise student welfare, engagement, and empowerment. Our collaboration with faculties and administration should be grounded in mutual respect and a shared commitment to nurturing a supportive and inclusive educational community where every student's voice is heard and valued.

Let us, therefore, embrace Prof. Torpiano and Prof. Azzopardi's wisdom and work collaboratively towards a future where students are not just passive participants but active agents of change and progress in the academic realm which leads much beyond to political progress.

This perspective not only broadens the responsibility of academic staff but also calls for an integrative approach where student feedback becomes a cornerstone of educational policies. Implementing such changes demands that institutions not only adjust their metrics of success but also reevaluate their pedagogical methods and administrative policies to better suit the evolving needs of their students. This shift towards a more holistic form of education, where student well-being and academic performance are intertwined, has the potential to redefine the academic landscape.

To foster this environment, institutions must cultivate channels for open communication, creating platforms where students can express their concerns, aspirations, and feedback without fear of reprisal. Regular interaction can bridge the gap between students and Faculty, ensuring that the educational system evolves in response to the direct needs and insights of its most essential stakeholders.

By adopting these student-focused strategies, universities can transform into dynamic learning environments that not only meet the academic needs of students but also attend to their personal development and overall wellbeing. The ultimate goal is to create an educational experience that is not only instructive but also profoundly inspiring and deeply responsive to the societal shifts and technological advancements shaping our world today.



COLLABORATION WITH THE TOP BRASS

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

HOW DOES COLLABORATION WITH HIGHER MANAGEMENT FEATURE IN THE DEANS' ROLE?

In addition to maintaining strong working relationships within the Faculty, collaboration with central University management is necessary for a Dean to lead effectively. Such collaboration ensures alignment with the University's strategic direction and facilitates the acquisition of resources, guidance, and support. Prof. Torpiano and Prof. Azzopardi remark that despite some challenges and limitations within the University structure, there is a willingness to support decisions, initiatives, and projects when there is a justifiable basis.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

I have to say that I worked closely with most of the Pro-Rectors, with some more than others. Their sense of humanity was admirable, and I would like to highlight the support we got as a Faculty from most of the Pro-Rectors. These were people with whom I worked very closely. I also found support from both Registrars who were in office during my time as Dean and the Rector who was there at our beck and call. The numerous Administrative Directors were in most cases, in tandem with what we tried to do and also understood my sense of urgency. Yes, it takes some pushing of the envelope and the occasional 'breaking of rules' or, should I say, 'my own interpretation' of the rules!

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I always found help. Sometimes, people tell me: "*Hold on a minute, show me what you will do with it.*" I always found a positive response to that.

...

The departments were also being restructured, which obviously involved staff. Obviously, there were discussions, but I had to lead them. It took me time and energy to convince the UM authorities that I needed a bigger budget, but once you explain things and you get them on board, it is fine, not easy, but fine.

It was such a radical change that was needed at my Faculty that it wasn't a question of enough resources. I mean, we never have enough resources. For example,

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Getting things done in a Faculty requires initiative, creativity, enterprise and ingenuity. Sticking solidly and waiting for the rules to dictate is a prescription for acquiescence. I always believed that if people around you are convinced that your motivation is a good one and genuinely interested in making hay while the sun shines, they end up on your side. I have always been passionately committed to my Alma Mater and my desire to serve unconditionally but you cannot do that by sitting on the fence. You need to take the plunge but keep the name of the Institution in high regard, which I believe I have done together with my colleagues.

...

Every year, we have been in the media not less than 150 times, whether it is written, broadcast, or social media reporting on the work we did.

this building is small for us. There are always limitations we need to work around, but I always found a helping hand from senior management. I must admit, probably I am lucky!

...

On another note, I had two colleagues whose applications for promotion to Professorship were rejected. I thought this was unfair, as they deserved it. So, I resigned from the Deanship, and the Rector phoned me to ask why. I replied that I could not face my two colleagues because they did not deserve this rejection. It wasn't blackmailing, but I wanted people to take this seriously, because I thought it was being taken very lightly.

Remarks

Prof. Valerie Sollars

University of Malta Pro-Rector for Strategic Planning & Sustainability

I would like to start this short commentary by thanking Andrew and Alex not only for their years of service, contributions and dedication to their respective Faculties and to the University Community but also for the initiative in putting this publication together, a publication they have identified as 'The Deans' Manifesto'.

In defining 'manifesto' for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Munro (2024) purports that, 'Although manifestos can claim to speak for the majority, they are often authored by a nonconformist minority and are linked to the idea of an avant-garde that signals or even leads the way to the future...' In keeping with their inimitable ways of making themselves heard, it seems that as Andrew and Alex look ahead to new chapters and life after the Deanship, they are intent on making an indelible mark on our memory through the publication of this manifesto.

In this theme, my colleagues focused on their relationship with the Rectorate and senior administrative offices at University. From my experiences gathered as a former Dean of the Faculty of Education and others garnered in the ten months since I took up the appointment of Pro-Rector, I firmly believe that establishing a positive, strong, professional working relationship with the Rector and Pro-Rectors is not only desirable but a sine qua non within a complex organisation and institution such as the University. I would extend the argument to include and promote healthy relationships among Deans and with other colleagues occupying offices where leadership is central and this would include Directors of Centres and Institutes, Heads of Department, administrative staff. We are all in roles of responsibility and service and thus need to fulfil our duties and obligations to the best of our abilities, with a commitment to strengthen and improve the University's mission. Evidently, we see things from different perspectives but it is only in stitching together these different points of view, can we weave a strong institution

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which is inclusive, accountable and sustainable. Working at cross-purposes would only lead to the weakening of the fabric which binds us and unravelling of the common good.

There are a number of conundrums upon which we need to reflect when we are considering how relationships are built and nurtured. Primarily, the individual vs the collective comes to mind. We have one University but many entities. Do we want entities to compete or collaborate? Are we interested in rankings to out-do each other, or ratings to help each other improve? Do we want to promote a fraction or the whole institution?

Amongst colleagues and staff in all ranks, there are leaders, managers and followers. Insightful, successful and strategic leadership values the skills which all individuals have, humbly acknowledges personal strengths and confidently harnesses these unique contributions. We all have and experience different realities but we stand to gain and learn from creating and participating in opportunities which allow for sincere, open dialogue, where an exchange of ideas, views and perspectives are sought after in order to make informed decisions to continue to build a robust academic institution, offering optimal learning experiences for students and addressing research areas with strong recommendations which impact and shape policies for our society.



CHAPTER 8

BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE UNIVERSITY

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

HOW DOES THE DEAN'S ROLE EXTEND BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY?

Prof. Azzopardi and Prof. Torpiano identify community engagement as the cornerstone of the Dean's role. They are also adamant that academics should attempt to contribute to the community. They believe that a commitment to extend the involvement of their respective Faculty beyond the confines of the University fosters a reciprocal relationship between the University and the wider community. This is impactful in terms of facilitating mutual growth, enhancing access to the body of knowledge generated by the University and effectively sharing of resources.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

Many academics in our Faculty use their academic knowledge to communicate with the general public, and they do it very well. As academics, we need to understand that this is our role not only as per the Collective Agreement but also in our belief to be public intellectuals and academic activists. As academics, we are recognised and valued by society in terms of our expertise, and so we need to, in turn, give back to the community through active engagement. I think that Faculties should emphasise this, and it is a pity that some do not do enough of this. So yes, I think that the University's role in society should not be just that related to teaching and research, but we should also influence the country's agenda, which we are not doing enough of.

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I know there is the cliché of universities being ivory towers. Now, there may be ivory tower universities in other countries because maybe they can afford to be so but ours is practically the only University in the Country. How can the University not take a holistic role?

...

I've been President or Chairperson of a school for 10 years, and I've been President of the Chamber of Architects and Civil Engineers, addressing the views of the profession, for I don't know how many years, possibly ten years in all, I think. I am currently in my fifth year as President of Din l-Art Ħelwa. It's impossible not to be engaged, otherwise, you're not a Professor at all.

...

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...

Ours is the Università ta' Malta, as the Rector likes calling it, and it is mostly state-funded. Millions of Euros go into it. So, it is our duty to give something back to the State and not only in teaching, scholarship and research but also in community engagement.

...

This has been one of my main aims, too, as I led this Faculty. In fact, we have developed many initiatives that involve distributing research to the general public and identifying concerning areas in the local setting that need further exploration. One such example is loneliness, which we have invested a lot of money and energy to produce two documentaries, two public surveys 100 actions to eliminate loneliness and a number of papers and publications. This issue is now on the national agenda.

...

Social media is very effective, it is the 'in thing'. But it's not just about recruiting students but also about communicating the freshness of the Faculty and its core message, that of 'social justice' and the ease with which you can communicate and democratise knowledge. But it's not social media on its own. You need good content. In this way, by communicating your ideas, you get closer to people, and people get closer to you. We dismantled many pre-conceived ideas, and nowadays a large number of stakeholders support us to the hilt.

...

One thing that characterised my Deanship was the fact that we issued a number of Press Releases on an array of subjects; racism, the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia, the attack on the Judiciary and other themes. There were two different ways of doing this. In each PR, we made it clear whether it came out as a statement from the Dean's Office or one shared by the Dean, Deputy Deans and Heads of Department. We issued our statements directly to the newsrooms via email, Facebook and Instagram.

Our Open Dialogue Sessions were another fora that pushed important issues on the national agenda. Another area I have worked a lot is in prison justice activism. This as well has been placed on the national agenda.

So, can you, as a Dean, not be that engaged? You can, but I admire Andrew, for example, because he is part of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing. He can talk about what happens in prisons, politics, and drugs, so he is more credible as a Dean, even to students.

...

Look also at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. Most academics there work in the clinical setting, so they continuously engage with the practical field. When we retreat from our field, I find it a bit disappointing, and a letdown.

...

If a member of our Faculty is an expert in the field, I think it is important to contribute, it is important that we are all in a position to contribute to the community.

...

Social media can be useful in communicating with the public, but it has its limitations. Take 'Din L-Art Helwa', for example. We have our social media team. Recently, someone remarked that we are not very present on X (former Twitter). This person might have been right. Social media requires a different type of language, and it conditions you to write statements in a certain way. Sometimes, it is not the simple black-on-white or a one-liner you need more depth to convey the correct information.

...

I find printed articles to be a better mode of communication because they allow for more depth. They tell me that young people don't have the time to read articles, which is sad because things are not simply black and white. You can't simply say, "Ah, look, I'm against this, but I'm in favour of this," and that's it. You need full information to be able to make an informed decision, but I understand that this is a new reality we are contending with.

Remarks

Prof. Petra Caruana Dingli

Edward de Bono Institute for Creative Thinking and Innovation

Both Deans here emphasise the importance of engaging with the wider community and highlight their own considerable efforts and commitment to this. Scholars teaching and researching at University can also contribute positively to society on concerns and topics that lie outside the curriculum. The role of an academic is seen to reach well beyond exclusively speaking to colleagues and students about the finer points of a common subject area.

While it is important to disseminate specialised expertise and professional knowledge as widely as possible, academics can play constructive and leading roles in broader matters of public interest. Scholarship nurtures critical thinking skills. It trains us to seek reliable evidence and to structure robust arguments. Our University also fosters an interdisciplinary approach that can generate new perspectives through the sharing of knowledge, ideas, and methods from different fields. Bringing together diverse educational backgrounds can spark new ideas or innovative solutions for society.

In their thoughts on community engagement, Alex and Andrew both draw attention to social media as a means of communicating and democratising knowledge while also pointing out some limitations. Social media provide a dynamic opportunity for people to interact and readily express their views on every subject under the sun. Yet this influential forum is also inundated with rash opinions and unfounded conclusions. Through any media channels, academics can contribute positively to informing and shaping public discussion about social, scientific or cultural issues. Critical thinking is not restricted to a fixed channel of learning, and it is up to individual scholars to set their own boundaries.

The efforts that some academics put into activities and efforts that reach out to the community are not always recognised enough. Others do not put their head above the parapet, restricted to the narrow confines of their subjects, and only engage in 'outreach' activities that are tightly integrated within the silo of their normal teaching and research duties. But some do attempt to stretch well outside the box. In their roles as Deans, Alex and Andrew have evidently both been sincerely committed to engaging with the community in their different ways. They have demonstrated that— with motivation, energy and commitment — it is possible to achieve a great deal reaching outside the routine curriculum and daily life on campus.



CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

Which are some of the challenges that a Dean may encounter?

The role of a Dean is crucial in shaping the academic and administrative direction of the Faculty. Unsurprisingly, this leadership position comes with a unique set of challenges and needs. Prof. Torpiano and Prof. Azzopardi explain that some of these challenges and needs are related to the University's operating system, while others involve particular characteristics of the workforce. Understanding these challenges and addressing the corresponding needs can shed light on the support required to navigate the complex landscape of a Faculty.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

I think that one aspect that we need to focus more on is that of appreciating each other. I know this sounds a bit soft, but oftentimes at University, as in other work settings, we are too concerned with what others are doing and saying and only reserve positive comments for obituaries! If we could only be more honest and authentic in our interactions with others and be happy with the achievements of each other we would be in a better place.

In my opinion, it is a barrier that academics work so individually, and COVID-19 didn't help with this. Unfortunately, we know that social interactions lose out a lot when we are not together enough, rubbing

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I don't like online communication very much. If I have to talk to a Head of Department, I would rather go upstairs than phone them. I answer emails as long as I have time, so don't send me an email and expect the answer immediately!

...

I disagree with the system of rewarding academic staff with promotions. I don't agree at all. On paper, it seems as if it takes student interactions into account, but the bottom line is that it is focused primarily on publications.

...

I am not sure if community engagement is really taken into consideration as the promotion process involves

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shoulders, sharing a coffee and working directly with each other.

...

Making time to meet in person means that when we have a conflict, and we speak in person, it can be resolved within a short period of time. If you are not meeting people in person, issues just go on and on. When we meet with each other, we can resolve this, but this cannot be done through emails or text messaging. I believe in this very strongly. So, for example, if you have a lecture at 10 am and another one at 4 pm, it would be great if you could stay around and meet people rather than doing everything remotely. We need each other, and we need to see each other to grow as a Faculty.

The fact that we as Deans are asked to provide a recommendation on promotions is a good thing and an improvement from how the system worked before. It is also more transparent. The only thing is that for Associate and Full Professor grades, it takes too long for people to know the outcome of their application, even though the situation seems to have improved immensely these last years.

As Deans, we do meet up with each other during Senate, the College of Deans, and a couple of socials during the year. However, it would be really helpful if Deans could meet each other more often and build stronger working relationships. Being a strong believer in systems, it is through creating structures that will make us work together.

One of my shortcomings is the limited liaison with other faculties. I think that there should be much more intersectionality between faculties at the University. However, this needs to be within a structure rather than happening haphazardly because specific individuals choose to work with people they get along well with and that is not good enough.

The system should facilitate interfaculty work in a way that is independent of (just) the goodwill of specific individuals.

...

At University, there is a tendency for disciplines to work in isolation even though in reality, many disciplines overlap and would benefit from interfaculty input and

third parties and external reviewers. So, I ask, how would they know how much time one would have dedicated to community engagement? The promotions process seems to encourage staff to forget about students, focus on their careers, publish papers and that's it. I have seen this happen. So, for example, the Heads of Departments, they really work hard and they know they can't publish. They don't have the time. So, they know they are not going to be promoted surely not as fast as others who are not and I resent that.

liaison. For example, look at what we have managed to do with mental health because people were willing to work with each other. So, there needs to be a more formalised relationship between faculties, and this would mean that the expertise that people have would be shared by many more.

...

Unfortunately, the University doesn't really award hard work. I am not referring to allowances or bonuses but to more resources for faculties when the investment in energy is evident for all to see. For example, look at how much work our Faculty has done. We have generated thousands of Euros in research, books, papers, and seminars. We have set up new systems like stakeholders' meetings. We have organised professorial lectures, vlogs, podcasts, magazines, a journal, and a newspaper and our student cohort kept growing as were our programmes of study. We also publish the orations and a children's book. So, the proof of the pudding is there and being eaten!

Remarks

Prof. Mario Thomas Vassallo

Head, Department of Public Policy, FEMA

The experiences recounted in this volume by Deans Torpiano and Azzopardi tell a multifaceted story. A story incubated in the divergent academic disciplines that the two Deans originated from but, eventually, morphed into the managerial responsibilities that they both had to serve. Deans are, primarily, academics with a managerial role. Not the best of all combinations! As an academic, a Dean is expected to think critically about the respective discipline, contribute towards new pastures of knowledge and engage in thought-provoking exercises within academic circles. As a manager, a Dean needs to organise the Faculty resources, whilst ascertaining their effective and efficient usage. In this endless game of mental gymnastics played every single day within the chaos of campus life, Deans are expected to make well-informed decisions on everything. From leading fellow scholars and administrators to managing financial matters. From solving student-related affairs to designing course restructuring. From mapping strategic plans to steering operational choices.

In this vein of complex decision-making, Deans must navigate the tension between preserving institutional tradition and fostering innovation. Some Deans, inherently, hold tight to tradition, while others are more prone to embrace change. At times it is a question of either tradition or innovation. At other times, it is a situation where tradition and innovation can coexist. While tradition serves as a source of identity and continuity for universities, innovation is essential for remaining relevant and competitive in a rapidly evolving world.

On the hand, tradition plays a pivotal role in the identity and culture of higher education institutions, shaping their values, practices, and institutional memory. Deans are often tasked with preserving and upholding these traditions, which may include academic rituals, normative conventions and institutional practices. Moreover, tradition can serve as a stabilizing force amidst change, providing a sense of continuity and security in times of uncertainty.

On the other hand, innovation is essential for the faculties seeking to adapt to changing societal needs, technological advancements, and global challenges. Deans play a critical role in fostering a culture of innovation within their faculties and departments, encouraging Faculty members to explore new pedagogical approaches, research methodologies, and interdisciplinary collaborations. By investing in think tank incubators and joint partnerships, Deans can stimulate creativity and knowledge creation within their institutions. Moreover, innovation can enhance the relevance and impact of academic programs, attracting top talent and fostering partnerships with industry and government stakeholders.

Balancing tradition and innovation present a unique challenge for Deans, requiring them to navigate competing priorities, stakeholder expectations, and institutional constraints. Successful Deans recognize that tradition and innovation are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary forces that can coexist and reinforce each other. By fostering a culture of respectful dialogue and collaboration, Deans can engage Faculty, students, and alumni in conversations about the relevance of tradition in a rapidly changing world. Moreover, Deans can leverage tradition as a source of inspiration and guidance for innovation, drawing upon the wisdom of the past to inform future directions and strategies.

Ultimately, the role of the Dean in managing tradition and innovation is about promoting institutional resilience and adaptability in a dynamic and uncertain environment. Deans must cultivate a sense of institutional identity and purpose while also fostering a spirit of experimentation and openness to change. This requires visionary leadership, strategic foresight, and a willingness to challenge conventional wisdom and embrace new ideas. By striking the right balance between tradition and innovation, Deans can position their institutions for long-term success, ensuring that they remain relevant, responsive, and resilient in the face of evolving challenges and opportunities.

This tension was surely experienced by Deans Torpiano and Azzopardi throughout their tenure. They were the ones who had to decide whether to opt for a managing style that places innovation in contradiction with tradition OR promulgate a governing praxis where the two forces are treated as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. I call this the Dean's OR dilemma. If we are to extend the dilemma a bit further, we would then have to refer to the trade-off between institutionalism and personalism in managing organisations. The former emphasises the importance of organisational structures, norms, and routines in shaping behaviour and outcomes within higher education institutions. In other words, institutionalism promulgates in-built, age-old traditions. Contrastingly, personalism accentuates the influence of individual actors, most notably the Deans in our case, in driving change and innovation within institutions. Hence, personalism acts as a break with tradition and, consequently, generates transformations and innovation. Balancing institutionalism and personalism is essential for effective governance and management, as it allows Deans to better solve their 'or' dilemma. Tradition versus innovation OR innovation and tradition.

Torpiano and Azzopardi have served their role with dignity, wherein their distinctive and passionate personalism was exercised within the heavily institutionalised environment of our Alma Mater. They respected tradition and embraced innovation against all odds but, at the same time, with serenity and grace.



CHAPTER 10



PERSONAL INVESTMENT

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

WHAT KIND OF PERSONAL INVESTMENT DOES THE DEAN'S ROLE REQUIRE?

Whilst the role of the Dean is a good fit for an individual who is deeply committed to the mission and values higher education, it also demands considerable personal investment. This personal effort spans various dimensions, including the emotional, physical, and financial. The time commitment required to lead a Faculty effectively needs consideration, too. This points towards the need for self-care during the Deanship. Prof. Azzopardi and Prof. Torpiano describe the sacrifices that they endured and the self-care strategies that helped them navigate through this Deanship experience.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

The fact that my Deanship will terminate shortly leaves me with a bitter-sweet feeling. When you have invested 8 years in it, it is a big investment. It's an investment on an emotional and financial level because people think that being a Dean is financially beneficial - it is not. Most Deans that I know and that I have a relationship with have given up a lot because you have to be wholly dedicated to being a Dean, and so there is also a financial price to pay. Apart from that, there is an emotional investment as well because you are constantly involved in trying to support your staff. In our case, we have almost 60 resident academics, there are over 100 part-timers and casuals, I leave 15 RSOs, a

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I love the role and I don't switch off at all.
...
Sometimes I get tired but there again, I'm 69 years old so, getting tired is not something I am worried about.
...
I work a lot and sometimes I do feel stressed especially when I have deadlines. And yes, I dedicate some time to do manual work as I always feel better after doing it. So I would paint a room or lay tiles. I think that helps me although I do not have as much time as I want to because of other commitments.
...

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cohort of over 100 Ph.D. candidates (at different stages of their studies), over 20 administrators, obviously a thousand students to take care of and to support. There's a family price as well because, obviously, this role is not a 9-to-5 job.

...

I really enjoyed the role. Honestly, there is nothing else I like doing more than this. I had to sacrifice many things to be a Dean, but I enjoyed the process.

...

Possibly one of the most exciting moments for me is when students come to the Faculty during the graduation buscades, and I tell them: "*You are my champions!*" And we celebrate together...and we sing and jump! It is amazing. Likewise, when I am on the podium during graduation ceremonies, trying to read in Latin (and in the process failing miserably), I see the proud faces of all the graduates and their guests in front of me. What a proud moment.

...

But if you don't enjoy being a Dean, it will have a horrible impact on your life, so it needs to be something that you really like doing, meeting people (that is how I spend most of my time), troubleshooting, sharing the stories - it is a human encounter.

...

Our mental wellbeing has a limit, so sometimes I do need a few minutes to reflect and get back my mental clarity - otherwise, I wouldn't cope.

When you are a Dean, I think it is important to regulate yourself. It would be inaccurate to feel that you must work nonstop 24/7 to be an effective Dean. You need to find time to do other things you enjoy. For example, on Friday evenings, I go out with my wife and on weekends enjoy watching football & Formula 1 racing.

...

I do not know about anyone else, but speaking about myself, my family always remained a priority above anything else.

Well, let me tell you something. Around two years ago, I bought a small house, and workers were finishing it up. But there were some final tasks that needed to be done, and I wanted to do them myself, slowly. So I would go there maybe once a week, maybe less than that because sometimes there's a weekend where I can't go, not more than a morning or an afternoon because it is also tiring work, painting, fixing, and nailing. But I love doing it.

...

I have a strong family around me and as I said, my wife is very understanding. I don't have many friends. I have some close friends. And I am a calm person, by nature.

Remarks

Prof. Maureen Cole

*Department of Social Policy & Social Work,
Faculty for Social Wellbeing*

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi and Prof. Alex Torpiano both highlight the extraordinary investment, personal, emotional, and financial they have had to make to perform their role as Deans. If I may, I will address them as Andrew and Alex because they are both colleagues and friends. Andrew says 'this role is not a 9 to 5 job' and Alex says 'I don't switch off at all'. I was struck by these comments because they ring very true, they reflect my experience as well and yet I wonder whether it should not be so. The leadership of a Faculty or other academic unit does not necessarily have to be all-consuming to be effected to the highest of standards. Perhaps, drawing on management models that make such demands on people is not such a good idea after all and we should be exploring other ways to manage the faculties that are consonant with the needs of higher education institutions and that are more respectful of the people who lead these institutions. On the other hand, I appreciate and admire their extraordinary commitment to their role and their faculties. I cannot but applaud it...

Another thought that occurred to me as I read Andrew's and Alex's experiences was how they each had to find their way to perform their role as Dean. I wondered how much support and mentorship they had received to meet their role. I am aware that informal support can be obtained from other Deans who are ready to share their experiences with new Deans; however, I think that more needs to be done to support people taking on the role. A formal induction programme would be helpful, as would a more formalised peer support or mentorship system. I know that I would certainly have benefitted from such a system!

Both Andrew and Alex, emphasise the part played by their families and the support they both received from their wives. This is certainly vital, however, I was also struck by what Andrew said about dedicating time to nurturing his relationship with his wife. Alex, points to the need for other 'projects' that demand focused attention and how he loved the manual work he was doing on his house. The importance of strong nurturing relationships and the part played by hobbies are well-documented in the literature on self-care (Lee et al., 2020) and these shine through in their experiences. It is also clear from their experiences that their self-care proved valuable in both self-preservation and in helping each of them reach their professional goals.

Reference

Lee, J.J, Miller, S.E. & Bride, B. E. (2020). Development and initial validation of the self-care practices scale. *Social Work*, 65(1), 21-28. doi:10.1093/sw/swz045





RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENTS

Commentary

Prof. Paulann Grech

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS RELATED TO THE DEAN'S ROLE?

The previous sections have explored the multifaceted aspects of the Dean's role. The process starts with the Dean having a vision, which will evolve into a strategy. Having a robust structure within the Faculty should be one of the first steps to ensure the maintenance of the day-to-day running of the Faculty and to facilitate the implementation of the strategy. The Dean's leadership and communication style are crucial in sustaining working relationships, and various skills must be carefully employed when addressing the situations that may arise. An important piece of advice offered by Prof. Torpiano and Prof. Azzopardi is that of having worthy causes to justify the Dean's actions.

They also highlight the need for the Dean to be accessible and react promptly whilst time-managing relentlessly. Students are everything, without them, the University structure wouldn't even exist and this is why both Deans prioritise their relationships with students and do their utmost to interact with and involve them at every juncture of the journey. The University's higher management is recognised as a valuable source of guidance and support when faced with the challenges and needs that inevitably characterise the Dean's life. Both Deans acknowledge the importance of looking beyond the University's perimeters by emphasising the need for community engagement. Given all the duties that encompass the Dean's role, it is clear that considerable personal investment is required. This identifies the need for self-care to protect one's mental and physical health and safeguard the Dean's personal life. Exploring the Dean's role may lead one to focus excessively on the intensive effort required to lead a Faculty.

However, the achievements and rewards related to the Dean's unique vantage point from which to shape the Faculty and influence the trajectories of staff and students while contributing to the community cannot be negated. Prof. Torpiano and Prof. Azzopardi make it clear that they loved their role, and their achievements led to a sense of long-lasting pride and satisfaction.

IN THEIR WORDS

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

Our best achievement is that the Faculty has a stronger identity, and it is recognised and understood by the community. I'm very proud of where the Faculty is now.

...

Another achievement is the fact that we have managed to generate so much funds for research, an estimated 1.7 million Euros and added to that another quarter of a million to help with the events resulting in research findings and outcomes that were returned back to the community. Our research sets the pace for evidence-based initiatives, strategies related to gender issues, disability, community development, mental health, traffic, trauma, addiction, youth issues, adoption, and so many other themes. The media was very helpful. They appreciated that we were providing them with material, and I feel that we were trailblazers on a number of themes. In fact, media personnel started using research outcomes provided by academics.

Other moments of great satisfaction were related to students. Graduations, buscades and enjoying these amazing times with them and watching the happy faces of their family members. It is probably the only time in my life when I have 500, 600 happy faces in front of me. It is a great feeling to know that we managed to get these students to their destination, and for some of them, it wasn't a walk in the park.

...

It is also very rewarding to watch my academic colleagues get promoted or recognised in other ways, that is so satisfying.

Prof. Alex Torpiano

I am proud of the achievement of completely changing the outlook on the profession in Malta, completely opening the way to a modern approach. It is not yet fully achieved but we are on the right track, consequently, opening Europe to our graduates.

...

Now we have an active Faculty Board, I am proud to say that I also see that the Heads of Departments are working on their own initiative without needing me.

...

I always enjoyed interacting with students and seeing how they react positively when they realise that change is beneficial.

Remarks

Prof. Colin Calleja

Dean, Faculty of Education

Reflecting on the accomplishments highlighted by the two Deans, I am reminded of Paulo Freire's notion of 'love' in education. For Freire, education embodies an educator's commitment to engage learners critically in their reality, empowering them to participate actively in societal transformation. Freire famously asserted that education *"becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world"* (Freire, 2000, p.34).

In the realm of leadership, the term "love" may appear out of place amidst corporate rhetoric and strategic planning. However, its significance cannot be overstated. Both Deans express satisfaction in their tenure's achievements, which have contributed significantly to the success of their staff and students. Their actions possess a transformative power within leadership, quietly propelling teams forward, fostering resilience, and cultivating trust and collaboration.

Love in leadership encompasses empathy, compassion, and genuine care for those being led. It transcends hierarchical structures, fostering authenticity and understanding in interactions. Leaders embodying this virtue recognise the intrinsic worth of each team member, valuing their unique perspectives, talents, and contributions. This fosters an environment where individuals feel seen, heard, and valued – conducive to growth and innovation.

A significant manifestation of love in leadership is the creation of a supportive and nurturing environment. Both Deans prioritize the wellbeing of their team members, acknowledging their triumphs and struggles, offering support and guidance where needed. Fostering a culture of psychological safety empowers teams to take risks, experiment, and learn from failures.

Love in leadership also fosters resilience, serving as an anchor in times of uncertainty and challenge. It inspires loyalty and commitment, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among team members. This emotional connection becomes a source of strength, enabling individuals to persevere through adversity with courage and determination.

Furthermore, love in leadership aligns with servant leadership - a philosophy emphasising the well-being and development of others. Leaders prioritise the needs of their team, leading by example with humility, integrity, and a commitment to a higher purpose.

Importantly, love in leadership does not preclude accountability but rather fosters it. As Deans, we hold ourselves and others to high standards while offering support and guidance. We need to approach challenges collaboratively, inviting dialogue and feedback to drive continuous improvement.

In essence, love in leadership is a transformative force, laying the foundation for inclusive, compassionate, and resilient learning organisations. As the world faces complex challenges, authentic leadership grounded in love has never been more critical.

To sum up, the significance of love in educational leadership cannot be overstated, especially when considering the transformative influence it has on organizational success. Love serves as a powerful force, empowering leaders to inspire, motivate, and uplift those under their guidance. Let us acknowledge the two Deans' ongoing efforts to motivate and inspire both their academic staff and students. Their commitment to fostering a culture of compassion serves as a testament to the transformative power of love in educational leadership.

Reference

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TESTIMONIALS

IN RELATION TO DEAN AZZOPARDI, FACULTY FOR SOCIAL WELLBEING

H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca

President Emeritus of the Republic of Malta

Throughout the decade I have known Prof. Andrew Azzopardi, he has constantly epitomised the essence of what an academic should embody. As the Dean of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, he has grasped the profound truth, that the role of a University extends far beyond the boundaries of its Campus. The onus of any University does not end with imparting academic knowledge; it must actively engage with society, with the community, grounding its teachings in the realities of the world.

Prof. Azzopardi understands this responsibility and calling. He is not satisfied with mere scholarly discourse; he advocates for the translation of academic insights into real-world solutions. Effective communication with diverse communities is essential for any academic endeavour to remain relevant. Prof. Azzopardi excels in this regard, bridging the gap between University and society. He brings the outside world into academia while taking the University's resources out to benefit society, the very community in which it exists.

Throughout his tenure as Dean, Prof. Azzopardi has fearlessly voiced his convictions on various contentious issues. His courage in advocating for change is commendable. A thriving academic environment depends on such boldness. Avoiding controversy might seem convenient in the short term, but it would be detrimental to fostering critical thinking and participation.

Prof. Azzopardi's example underscores the importance of engaging with dissenting opinions, vital for a vibrant intellectual community. His leadership has not only spurred innovative research initiatives but has also fostered an environment conducive to exploring unconventional avenues of societal discourse.

I have the pleasure of co-chairing the Children Rights Observatory Malta (CROM) with Prof. Azzopardi. CROM is a collaboration between the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the Faculty for Social Wellbeing within the University of Malta. CROM requires an ongoing collaborative effort to ensure Children's Human Rights at the heart of Malta's policies for the sustainable and holistic wellbeing of our Children and future generations. It is a venture which is working and yielding positive results. Prof. Azzopardi has played a role in its success.

In essence, Prof. Azzopardi embodies the spirit of a critical thinker and a compassionate academic. His contributions have enriched both the academic realm and the community, setting a benchmark for others to follow. Our country, and the University of Malta, could undoubtedly benefit from more academics of his calibre.

Audrey Bezzina

Ph.D. Candidate

Andrew Azzopardi fits perfectly as the Dean of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing; throughout my journey within the Faculty over the past three years, Andrew has been constantly supportive, offering guidance and encouragement. He positively leads his team, generating an environment that is more similar to that of a family rather than a rigid academic institution. With Andrew, the student will always be heard and empowered to face challenges and experience success. Andrew's energy as a Dean has been paramount to advocate for social justice, promote diversity, equity and inclusion within the community.

Nikita Cassar

Student

Master in Youth and Community Studies

I have been a student while Prof. Azzopardi served his Deanship for the past 6 years. During this time, he inspired me in many ways: to never stop talking even when people try to intimidate him into doing so, to be persistent with his causes, to be accessible, and to listen and discuss no matter how high up he was in the hierarchy. He used his Deanship not only to help generate professionals from all angles of social backgrounds but also to advocate publicly about rights and inequalities and topics which are controversial in Malta. Having Andrew represent us as a Faculty feels like we are firm and willing to go head-on, but gently, for what we stand for.

Maria Camilleri

Alumnus

B.A. (Hons.) Youth and Community Studies

My time at the Faculty would not have been the same without the leadership of Prof. Azzopardi. He epitomised the kind of education I hope future generations will experience, one which is inclusive, student-centred, engaging and holistic. Prof. Azzopardi played a key role in helping me understand the value of ongoing education. He created a space where everyone could freely express their thoughts and ideas without fear of judgment. This environment made us feel like individuals rather than numbers. He regularly checked in on us, and when we had difficulties, he and the Faculty were always ready to offer support. I am humbly grateful to him for teaching me the best lesson of all: the longing to be in a perpetual state of growth.

Graziella Vella

Research Support Officer

I joined the Faculty for Social Wellbeing in November 2022 as a part-time RSO. Along this journey, Prof. Azzopardi was always ever so present, to guide and advise. He supported me and believed in me. Most importantly, he helped me believe in myself again, in my skills and in my abilities. Thanks to his support and encouragement, I have managed to 'put pen to paper' and focus on starting my doctoral studies, which I have now just formally commenced. I will forever be grateful for this encouragement and for having met him as my 'boss'.

Charlene Fabri

*Administration Specialist
PA to the Dean*

Way back in July 2019, I was offered the position of a Personal Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing by the Dean himself. Little did I know how these years would develop and mould me into the person I am today. This was not just about keeping his busy calendar up to date, taking care of everyday correspondence and accompanying him to meetings. Apart from his open-door policy, I had to keep up with his stamina to reach out to the community; to offer support to entities who opted to base their policies on empirical data and to transform this Faculty into one which people out there could relate to. I must say that it wasn't an easy ride but a most satisfying, passionate and a learning curve indeed!



TESTIMONIALS

IN RELATION TO DEAN TORPIANO, FACULTY FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Etienne Magri

Ph.D. Candidate

I have known Prof. Torpiano since my first year at the Faculty in 1994. As Head of Department and an expert in his field, he always earned the utmost respect from us students, and as Dean, he also successfully revamped an outdated course structure. I recall him encouraging me to pursue postgraduate studies, making me aware of the complexity of today's buildings and the need to understand better how materials interact in structures. He always went out of his way to support students in their journeys and excelled at securing funding for research. He leaves behind a legacy, and his mission for the Faculty to have a living laboratory will soon become a reality for the next generation of researchers.

Daniel Agius

*Alumnus
Master of Engineering in Structural Engineering*

Reflecting on my academic journey, I consider myself fortunate to have studied at the Faculty for the Built Environment under the Deanship of Prof. Alex Torpiano. Through his remarkable leadership, knowledge, and awareness, he has steered the Faculty and its students towards an elevated quality of education. Since joining Faculty Board, I had the opportunity to experience first-hand Prof. Torpiano's hard work behind the scenes, constantly showing his care

and support for staff and students alike. I humbly believe that he has, for the better, shaped the development of my character both as an individual and as a soon-to-be professional.

Francesco Cassar

Alumnus

B.Sc.(Hons.) in Built Environment Studies

I entered the Faculty of the Built Environment towards the very end of Prof. Torpiano's tenure as Dean. From my first encounter with Prof. Torpiano, I was instantly struck by how he addressed my peers and me, and the welcoming environment he had cultivated within the Faculty. It became immediately clear that the Faculty, which I was now a part of, was in good hands. Moreover, I was keen on ensuring that I seized any opportunity to learn from him. Upon my election into SACES, I was able to develop a first-hand appreciation for Prof. Torpiano's dedication to the betterment of Faculty and the student organisation, which he himself started 50 years ago.

Antoine Gatt

Research Support Officer 2

During Prof. Torpiano's tenure as Dean, his leadership style was characterised by a forward-looking vision coupled with a genuine willingness to listen to others. His encouragement and support were like a beacon, illuminating the path for personal and academic growth. Thus, I regarded him not only as a capable administrator but also as a mentor and guide. Under his leadership, I felt empowered to explore, question, and achieve goals beyond what I thought possible. Prof. Torpiano's forward-looking mindset paved the way for innovative changes within the Faculty, which others thought impossible.

Jacqueline Deguara

Senior Manager (Faculty Manager)

In October 2012 I moved from the University administration to the Faculty for the Built Environment. A new journey, dealing with different people and different tasks. Prof. Torpiano was my first Dean. At that time, the Faculty was undergoing academic changes to the main programme of studies, from the B.E. & A. (Honours) to the new 3 + 2 system, i.e. the B.Sc. (Honours) in Built Environment Studies course followed by the Professional Masters programmes, the Master of Architecture and the Master of Engineering degrees. Prof. Torpiano was working very hard and was determined to have this new structure implemented since it was a very important change for the Faculty and for the students.

I must admit that his proposals were not always easy to deal with. With his diplomatic approach, he always managed to achieve his goals. The wellbeing of students was always his highest priority. His approach and leadership qualities helped me improve my current managerial position. I count myself lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Prof. Torpiano for the past twelve years. The journey over these years was not always easy, but it was surely a great learning and satisfying experience.

Below are some of the leadership qualities of Prof. Torpiano that I really admire: honesty; respect; always there to listen and willing to help the students, compassionate; practices an open door policy with students and staff; never angry and always positive; and, always ready to accommodate.



Fejn tfittixni ssibni
(Where you look for me you will find me)





Contributors

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