

Some examples of the executive system in practice (June 09)

In fall 2006 I meet with the VPAA and present him with documentation about the character of SOSC as not a social science department but a sociology department (also see the separate entry on the great interdisciplinary fudge). The VPAA encourages me to be “proactive.” I.e., the VPAA encourages a faculty member who has no rights whatsoever to turn SOSC into what it is supposed to be. The VPAA sees no need to take any action himself, or to ask his sub-executives to take any action. --- I get nowhere with the division head, and a dean who I confront later simply says: “We are not an economics department.” But being a sociology department obviously is fine.

The dean tells the faculty (in 2005?, 2006?) that the university is cutting his budget and the school will cease operation unless we put on a self-financing program. (No details or documentation is provided.) The division puts on a self-financing program with nobody, not even the department head, knowing what the rules are for a self-financing program. (I send an email to the Finance Office with specific questions and the Finance Office does not have an answer. I get a phone call.)

Once the self-financing program is up and running, the division faculty meeting with participation (and agreement) of the division head decides through voting on the use of a small proportion of the funds to pay cost-of-living adjustments to the faculty (since the university at that time had ceased to do so) and to remunerate performance (also something that the university had ceased, or near-ceased to do). We never again hear of this decision, and it is not implemented. The division head does not inform the faculty why the decision was not implemented. Nobody in the division raises any questions.

On 4 September 1998 the division faculty meeting decides on teaching standards for different level classes. The teaching standards are never again heard off, and do not form part of any of our evaluation. If the curriculum committee were aware of the adopted teaching standards (questionable), it does not, or not consequently enforce them.

The division faculty meeting decides to in the future only admit full-time PG students, and the new PG committee head in the following semester promptly admits part-time PG students.

The division spends much time creating a strategic plan that will finally create inter-disciplinarity by organizing the division along fields, each of which covers several disciplines. The strategic plan is delayed by the dean for a year and then is never heard of again. The division meeting votes that the field of economic development does not include “personal development” in the psychology discipline and the dean puts it back in (or omits to take it out). Nobody has given any thought to what the fields are about. (Also see my detailed proposal for the economic development field [“SOSC options”].)

--- The list on the absurdity of the division faculty meeting would appear endless.

After an academic review, the dean informs the faculty member of the outcome. In the case of rejection, the dean provides details on why the application has been rejected. The faculty member does not receive written evidence. The faculty member can, however, refer to the Hong Kong privacy law and obtain his/her full file from the office of the VPAA. None of the

feedback provided by the dean needs to match the reasons stated in the file. With oral feedback from the dean, there is no institutional memory. Future review committees at all levels of the university are unlikely to know what the dean requested the faculty member to change and are most unlikely to see the earlier review file. (Also see the academic review documentation.) Faculty members cannot appeal against a review decision even if it is based on false information. (Faculty members can appeal on procedural grounds only, and the appeals committee does not address the appeal; it simply votes.)

The division head is to give each faculty member feedback about their performance once per year. The division head typically has no expertise in the discipline of the faculty member (and similarly for the review committee).

The dean makes various appointments on behalf of the School Board and asks, in the usual manner, by email, if anyone objects. When a faculty member objects and asks for a secret vote, the dean ignores the request (and responds with angry emails on other topics). The President and the VPAA are aware of the exchange and take no action. --- Next time round, a new dean accepts the objection, asks the faculty member to provide an explanation for the objection (officially, the choice of approval or disapproval by a faculty member requires no explanation), and then invites the School Board to discuss if the (personal) explanation of that faculty member (who is presenting at a conference during the School Board meeting) is justified.

When a new division head proposes to have new hires approved by all faculty members, rather than just have a committee recommend to him who to hire, three senior faculty have reservations about faculty participation and nobody speaks out in favor of the proposal (which sinks the proposal).

The “Academic Personnel Policy and Procedure Manual,” which regulates appointments, academic reviews, promotion, substantiation, leave, and other academic personnel matters is approved by the Council, the Senate, or the University Administrative Committee. None of these are academic bodies. (The latter committee comprises the president, the three vice-presidents, the four deans, and the directors of three administrative units.) I.e., academic standards are set by administrators, with the latter two institutions under de facto control of the VPAA (who selects / appoints most of the people in these institutions) and perhaps the president.

The HKUST regulatory framework is infused with ambiguity. “Should’s” are routinely interpreted against faculty members. When a regulation includes the term “exception,” the exception is typically not specified, nor who can grant exceptions. The executive has the freedom to proceed any way s/he likes.