

**Managing the heart of the university:
Dean's offices in the process of changes.
New legal and organizational reality,
ed. by K. Górak-Sosnowska & R. Pajewska-Kwaśny, Warszawa, SGH, 2019, pp. 287.**

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A major reform of the higher education system began with the entry into force of the *Law on higher education and science* act (from October 1, 2018), aimed at improving conditions for practicing scientific and didactic excellence in Polish universities. The changes in the regulations concerned the organization of universities and ensuring the sustainable development of academic centers across the country, which influenced the model of university management after 2018. The edited volume entitled *Dean's offices in the process of changes. New legal and organizational reality* was written at this critical time of major changes in Polish higher education, and it provides a timely and thorough overview of the implications of the reform, especially regarding the management practices.

The reviewed book is a specific compendium of practical knowledge on how to organize and manage dean's offices in the face of legal changes. Among other topics, the book discusses a highly debated topic, that of the marketization of universities—which assumes treating universities as an enterprise, education as a service, and students as clients—that was affected by the changes in regulations at the national level. The book also discusses the handling of the following processes: studying, organizing the course of study, practicing science, etc. With such wide and relevant selection of topics, the book may be of interest to a wider audience, beyond scholars of Polish education.

To assure a diversity of perspectives, the editors of the book, Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska and Renata Pajewska-Kwaśny, invited both faculty members and administrative staff to contribute to this extensive volume on how universities are managed. The

authors of chapters have experience from working for different units in public and non-public universities in Poland. The list of authors also includes representatives of different fields and disciplines of science. It is through the everyday work, struggles and achievements, of these university staff that we can gain an insight into how higher education in Poland functions. While it is beyond the scope of this book review to summarize each chapter in full detail, instead this review focuses on selective contributions from this book that contribute to a better understanding of management in higher education.

Overall, the book is divided into three main parts, each touching on issues of organizational management of higher education, including organizational structure, organizational culture, communication systems, as well as administrative and legal conditions of the management processes at universities. Every part then consists of several chapters that look into these topics in more detail, through case studies and further elaboration.

The book begins with a general description of higher education, which help contextualize further chapters, especially for readers not well-versed in the higher education structure of Poland. Higher education institutions in Poland are divided into main groups: public and non-public institutions; those institutions (both public and non-public institutions) are further divided into two main categories: academic and vocational ones. The first part of the book entitled *Dean's office in the structure of the university* refers only to the structures of broad-profile academic universities, where dean's offices are the most important reservoir of knowledge about the functioning of universities.

A unique part of the edited volume is an in-depth discursive analysis of the etymology of the word "dean's office" by Jerzy Bralczyk, professor of humanities, one of the most popular normative authorities in the field of the Polish language. For example, we find out that the Polish word "dziekanat" ("dean's office") comes from the word "dean," which derives from the Greek noun "dekanos" that was also borrowed by the Romans as "decanus"; initially the term referred to the ecclesiastical administrative unit. Beyond the linguistic analysis, the book sheds light on much of the work and functioning the dean's office.

Another valuable contribution of the book is the database of good practices at the end of the monograph, consisting of 50 sets of good practices from 17 dean's offices from 14 Polish universities. These examples are practical solutions, procedures, ideas that make life easier for both employees and students and are inspirational cases of how challenges can be met and how improvements can be implemented in effective way, at times requiring collaborative efforts and at times innovative ideas. The database of good practices is divided into the following categories related to: solutions for students, IT solutions, legal solutions, cooperation with the environment, solutions for employees. Good practices then not only provide an insight into practical tasks that make the Polish higher education system run smoothly, but also pose an example for other countries.

A shortcoming of the book is the omission of any discussion regarding vocation-

al institutions¹. Polish vocational education (unlike academic education) offers only practical studies and must closely cooperate with the socio-economic environment (including enterprises, employers) to provide its students with the opportunity to pursue good-quality internships and practical classes, which certainly constitutes organizational and management challenge. Furthermore, vocation education is such a significant part of the educational landscape, that it merits a discussion in a book such as the *Dean's offices in the process of changes*. Each of the five chapters in the first part of the book highlights the role of the dean's office at universities, but ignores other forms of tertiary education.

Reading this part, the reader develops an understanding of the dean's office not only as an institution with its own structure, but also the people who, through their work and ideas, constitute the very institution. In other words, of the monograph allows us to look at the dean's office as a system responsible for university communication, an element of the university's organizational culture, and a unit responsible for development of the university's human capital. At the same time, the monograph is sensitive to the very people who make up this office and constructs an image of the employees at deans' offices in Polish universities: "on the one hand, they are people who like their work, the students and their work environment; on the other hand, they are people who feel underestimated by the university authorities and lecturers, mainly because of their earnings" (p. 78).

Another noteworthy contribution of the book is the discussion in the second chapter concerning methods and barriers of effective quality management in higher education sector, presented based on the results of an international research project carried out by Prof. Jakub Brdulak. The author presents good practices in quality management on the example of CEMS (Global Alliance in Management Education) at the SGH Warsaw School of Economics and indicates activities generating value for the student, and thus qualitative activities.

Moving on the second part of the book, entitled "Work management in the dean's office", readers can learn about the university's management process and risk management methods as key instruments for the implementation of the university's strategic activities. The authors in this section focus on a variety of stakeholders at universities (e.g., university employees and students), striving to identify factors that affect job satisfaction in the dean's office ("happy dean's office") and the quality of education. To that end, some chapters explicitly focus on the work of certain employees.

For example, the chapter written by Anna Mielczarek-Taica, analyzing employees' actions and modes of thinking, draws attention to the special role of the manager in the dean's office. The author promotes her concept of "effective motivation" in organizational units, where routine activities are performed, as well as the need for subjective treatment of administrative staff. In this part of the monograph, issues such as the evaluation system of administrative employees are discussed (that tend to be based on a properly defined goal and the expected result of the evaluation).

¹ In 2020, a total of 51,751 people studied at 33 Polish public vocational universities, which constituted 4.25% of all students and 6.08% of universities (Szkolnictwo wyższe i jego finanse w 2020 roku, tab. 8).

The third part of the book, entitled “Legal conditions for the work of the dean’s office,” then turns to analyzing legal conditions of the dean’s office’s work. This part discusses selected elements of the didactic process, including the methods of documenting the student education by dean’s offices. Moreover, the contributing authors’ research in this section indicates that improvements can be achieved only if standardized document templates are made available, as well as further reduction in bureaucracy and simplification in administrative procedures. The last chapter is a valuable contribution to the discussion of how to improve student services, including granting financial aid for international students.

When reading the monograph (especially the first and second part), readers develop an understanding of the dean’s office as the “heart” of a university, considering that dean’s offices are the core of universities, facilitating cooperation between all organizational units of the university. The web of relations and their functions is further assessed by authors of individual chapters, highlighting various working processes taking place in higher education institutions, including management processes, forms of collaborations and ways of sharing responsibilities. Authors also emphasize that employees at the dean’s office, just like at other administrative units, are formally labelled “employees who are not academic teachers,” which makes them unjustly invisible and underestimated (Act, 2018, art. 112)². This term, the authors suggest, describes valuable university staff not on their own terms, but rather in relation to some another group of employees, who are perceived as higher in the university hierarchy and indispensable. The book, however, makes a contrary point: it is indeed the university staff who do indispensable work.

To summarize, the authors of monograph are clearly well-versed in how universities, and especially deans’ offices, function in Poland, including aspects such as innovation, IT, organizational and legal solutions. The book is an invaluable resource for Polish-speaking audience interested in the work of deans’ offices, and should be an equally important resource for the international readership who wishes to learn about the functioning of universities through Poland as a case study.

The specificity of universities, where tradition is of fundamental importance, influences, inter alia, to the low level of modernization of the management in these organizations (Kuźmicz, 2015, p. 54). It then becomes imperative to create forums where university employees can exchange idea and share their experience. To this end, the activity of the Dean’s Offices’ Forum Association (described at the end of the monograph) appears to be an important panacea, which, on the one hand, notices human capital in universities and need for efficient management of it, and on the other hand, promotes the transformation of universities into modern learning-based organizations. It is thanks to the cooperation of the members of the Association that in the dean’s offices where they work daily, conscious processes of creating, maintaining, and acquiring knowledge takes place. The book, to some extent, pursues the same goal of starting a conversation and providing a platform where voices of university

² The author of this review believes that the term “who are not academic teachers” is rather unfortunate and may contribute to marginalization of this employee group.

employees can be heard.

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