

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 5. Introduction

This chapter describes the qualitative research design and methods used in the exploratory study of role of Vice-Chancellor in Australian universities. All participants in this research agreed to be interviewed or to be observed in a range of situations. All were provided with the consent form provided in Appendix (1) and were guaranteed anonymity. No names or individual identifying characteristics were used in the research and the subsequent reporting. For example, role descriptors that could be traced back to particular individuals have been rendered deliberately opaque by use of the labels ‘senior academic’ ‘member of the senior executive’ or ‘senior administrator’. The preceding chapters highlighted a number of issues in relation to the study of role theory. The major themes to emerge from the preceding discussion include: understanding the role process in organisational contexts requires close physical examination (Lundberg, 2001, p.1225) of the various influences on that role from the focal person perspective, the role senders’ perspective, and the range of environmental and social influences; role is a dynamic process and hence requires a complementary approach to its investigation; role may be highly context specific; and role may have multiple interpretations.

Graen (1976, p.1225) stated that “most studies purporting to investigate behaviour in organisations fail to adequately describe, much less explore, the parameters of the “concrete” setting in which the behaviour of interest occurs”. The researcher must engage the participants and the organisation according to Graen (1976, p.1227). This supports earlier discussion raised by Mintzberg (1973) highlighting the critical importance of context and this discussion forms the basis for the methodology outlined below.

The literature review generated the following research questions:

Previous research into university leadership and governance has tended to take a relatively “top-down” approach. This has been exemplified through the work undertaken by Marginson and Considine (2000) in particular. These authors also endeavoured to get close to the subject and obtained much valuable data from observation and interview. A criticism of their approach, however, was that the research was relatively top down in focus and tended to bypass input from a wider range of stakeholders in university governance and leadership, for example, student groups, general staff, and industrial relations groups (Gillies, 2000, p.33). The lack of a 360 degree perspective does not satisfy an exploration of role in the sense defined by Katz and Kahn (1978) discussed previously.

This research is focused on gaining an understanding of role enactment and its meaning from the perspective of the participants (Mullen, 1996). The research seeks to gain access to both public and “back of stage” (Goffman, 1956) performances in order to deepen our understanding of the Vice-Chancellor’s role in their university’s contexts. Very few researchers have been able to gain such deep level access to the professional lives of Vice-Chancellors. Thus, the methodology required for data gathering and analysis needed considerable openness and flexibility.

As Chapter Four argued, organisational roles require further research and explication. Capturing the complexity and subtlety of leadership roles requires researchers to design methodological approaches suitable to the task. Various counts estimate the number of studies devoted to leadership to number as many as 5000 (Craig & Yetton, 1995, p.1214). In a rather trite summation Craig and Yetton concluded that all we really know about successful leaders is that they are successful (1995, p.1214). These authors may be less than charitable in their summation but they do highlight the continued need to gain a better understanding of leadership roles in organisational contexts.

## **5.1 Ontology and Epistemology**

The ontological perspective in the current research is ‘constructivist/participatory’ and the epistemological design of the methodology is ‘subjectivist’ (Charmaz, 2000; Guba, 1990) whereby the individual’s interpretation of their world is sought rather

than the imposition of outsider perspectives, as may be the case with normative research approaches.

Virtually no ‘role’ analysis exists in the organisational context discussed in the previous chapters that bears relevance to university management and leadership roles. Patton (1980) suggests that rather than a ‘better or worse’ debate, researchers should adopt a paradigmatic perspective that suits the particular research question and context (1980, p.20). As Patton suggests, qualitative methods can provide ‘depth and detail’ (1980, p.22). Lundberg (2001) suggests data analysis and explanation are constrained by the method and that researchers should adopt an approach that allows them to get ‘close’ and then step backwards in order to make sense of the fine detail. He also believes the three virtues of research are that it should be ‘local’, ‘complex’, and ‘valid’. These criteria also form part of the methodological framework for the current research and are discussed in more detail below.

According to Lincoln and Guba’s typologies (2000, p.168) the ontological perspectives of the Constructivist paradigm provide relevant foundations for the current research. Table 5.1 below summarises the basic beliefs of the constructivist paradigm relevant to this thesis.

**Table 5.1 Basic Belief (Metaphysics) of Constructivist Paradigm adapted from (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, pp165-6)**

Item	Constructivism
Ontology	Participative reality – subjective-objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos
Epistemology	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings
Methodology	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context
Inquiry Aim	Understanding; reconstruction
Nature of knowledge	Individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus
Goodness or quality criteria	Trustworthiness and authenticity

Lincoln and Guba (2000, p.167) state they fit into the constructivist camp but that this is a loosely defined label. “We do not believe that criteria for judging either

“reality” or validity are absolutist...but rather are derived from community consensus regarding what is “real”, what is useful, and what has meaning (especially meaning for action and further steps)”. Reality is regarded as something that is multiple constructed (Charmaz, 2000, p.510). The role of the researcher in this case is to discover shared understanding and meaning by getting close to the subject and to continually seek consensus on what has been said or observed. Discovering meaning thus requires the researcher to seek as much information in natural settings in order to add context to the research.

Denzin and Lincoln further refine their definition of constructivism by broadening the “...goodness or quality” criteria to include “credibility, transferability, confirmability” (2005, p.24) and to encompass forms of narration within this paradigm such as interpretive case studies. Heron and Reason (1997) have challenged the scope of Denzin and Lincoln’s definitions. They introduce a new paradigmatic perspective that broadens constructivism. Heron and Reason (1997) believe constructivism has merit as an ontological and epistemological stance but fails to adequately explain the notion of experiential learning and interpersonal interaction, as they influence knowing. How can constructivism, in its current definition, explain the everyday experiences of humans as they go about their business, ask Heron and Reason. “Thus, we take the view that the mind’s conceptual articulation of the world is grounded in its experiential participation in what is present, in what there is” (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 277).

The critical notion here is that both constructivist and participatory ontological underpinnings are complementary, not exclusive, because each hinges on the importance of “self-understanding” as a foundation. Heron and Reason (1997) are making the pragmatic point that this understanding does not occur in a vacuum state. Their criticism seems to have been addressed, however, by Guba (1990, p.27) in defining a constructivist ontology, states “...realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, (my emphasis) local and specific, dependent on their form and content on the persons who hold them”. Heron and Reason’s response to this is to argue Guba and Lincoln do not adequately articulate the nature of the experiential knowing – that they have no “real-world referents” (1997, p.278). This point is considered in the current research by

including data obtained from observing actors and comparing it to their subjective reporting on what they have been doing.

## **5.2 Constructivist Framework**

The constructivist method adopted here does not satisfy all the anthropological criteria for ethnography as defined by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) in their strictest sense but does approximate the general tenets in respect to interviewing and observing human interaction. In this sense, the fundamental ethnographic roots of the methodology devised for this thesis must be acknowledged. Hammersley and Atkinson defined ethnography as: “In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus on the research” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.1). These authors noted that ethnography has been valuable in explaining phenomena and in theory development much in the way grounded theory has been used (1995, p.25). Further, an ethnographic approach is useful in exploring the unusual, or as Goffman may state, the previously hidden (Goffman, 1956).

Patton (1990, p.68) suggests the essential basis of ethnographic investigation is that it interprets and applies its findings from a cultural perspective. Culture is a component of organisation study and its influences may be profound on role performance, but culture by itself is but one part of the role performance model as defined in previous chapters. According to Hammersley, (1990) there are five features that define ethnography. These are:

People’s behaviour is studied in everyday contexts...

Data are gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.

The approach to data collection is ‘unstructured’ in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan set up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say and do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is

unsystematic; simply that initially the data are collected in as raw a form, and on a wide a front as possible.

The focus is usually a single setting or group, of relatively small scale...

The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations. (Hammersley, 1990, pp.1-2)

This thesis adopted an approach that aligns very closely with Hammersley's characteristics. Adopting an ethnographic constructivist approach allows the researcher to tap into the essence of the lived experience of the subjects in the study. Such research is value laden and is more interested in the nature of the relationships and social experiences of the actors. According to Denzin and Lincoln

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (1994, p.2).

The goal of the multimethod approach in this research has been to add "...rigor, breadth, and depth..." (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2) to the research process. The methodology seeks to achieve "...confirmability, i.e., agreement among a variety of information sources (Guba, 1978, p.17). That is, by seeking to reach consensus from the variety of data sources the participant and the researcher can move towards agreement as to the accuracy of the data gathering and its interpretation.

The emergence of qualitative investigations in diverse contexts continues to be extended. Bryman, Stephens, and aCampo (1996) for example, studied leadership in a United Kingdom police setting using semi-structured interviews. Tierney's (1987) use of ethnographic approaches to studying leadership in U.S. colleges and semi-structured interviews to study the roles of presidents in U.S. colleges and universities are considered early examples of the adoption of a qualitative perspective in higher education research.

Bryman et al., continually reinforce the notion that context is a critical factor in determining the outcomes of the particular research under investigation. Their research on construction workers and leadership reveal different details than research on university presidents. Each has its own unique circumstances and imperatives (Bryman et al., 1996).

Bargh et al, (2000) adopted a triangulated qualitative investigation into the role of Vice-Chancellors in UK and European universities. Their methodology of interview, unstructured non-participant observation, and document interpretation captured the fluid nature of leadership in real settings. They argued against adopting a time and motion study of role by suggesting it would not capture the dynamics of the evolutionary process under study. As they explain:

We were not concerned with being able to quantify with detailed precision the amount of time chief executives spend on each category of activity. Nor did we wish to get bogged down in arcane discussions about the categorisation necessary to construct accurate indices of what they did, hour-by-hour, day-by-day. The danger of such accounts is that they lead to a reductionist and deterministic approach to understanding the actions of chief executives and other managers. Universities are not simple bureaucratic structures easily understood in the 'organisation as machine' metaphor (Morgan, 1986). To collapse the task of explaining the role of Vice-Chancellor into component parts in this way would, in our view, risk missing the essential dynamics of leading creative organisations in complex environments. (Bargh et al., 2000, p.77)

### 5.3 Case Study Design Methods and Procedures

The research design for this thesis utilised a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2003a) to examine the role of Vice-Chancellor in two in-depth university studies. Following the discussion above, it was decided that depth rather than breadth of investigation would be most desirable in an exploratory design such as this.

Yin (2003b) described a number of features of case study research that are relevant to the theoretical framework of the present study. These include:

Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when

The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as a result

Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result

Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003b, pp.13-14).

Yin acknowledged that typical research questions such as “who”, “what”, “when”, “how”, and “why” are relevant to a case study design because they inform the strategy for the investigation. From this a number of relevant role-theory questions emerge: “Who” are the important role-senders in the Vice-Chancellor role-set? “How” do these role-sending behaviours work in practice? “What” contexts are important in the role-sending behaviour?

The units of analysis (according to Yin) are important to define in case study research and the present study proposes these include: one to one interactions with key stakeholders in the role-set; ongoing dynamics of interactions in small groups of the Vice-Chancellor and key stakeholders in their role-set; multiple layers of role-set participants both within the university structure and, in some cases, participants

outside the institution (for example, DEST officials or partners of the Vice-Chancellors); documentation both in the form of material written by the Vice-Chancellors and official material outlining the role requirements, such as University Acts or job descriptions.

The choice of a multiple case study design was primarily to enhance the opportunity to capture role behaviour in similar but different organisations within the same industry. Patton (1990) suggests the main strength of a case study approach is that the researcher can study a problem or issue in depth, making the likelihood of discovery more probable. While not seeking to generalise, this study was interested to examine the complexity of role performance and thus institutions of very different size were included. This was done to also enhance external reliability (Drew, Hardman, & Hart, 1996, p.169) and for providing a vehicle for comparing and contrasting different university contexts. As these authors note, replicability is often rejected in qualitative research yet Yin (2003b) suggests that cross case comparisons provide the researcher the capacity to describe patterns in broader contexts. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) also make a strong case for multiple cases to enhance the convincingness (or truthfulness) of the research design. In the end, the choice of two case study universities rested on the dual criteria of access and feasibility in the context of a Ph.D, while trying to ensure that the 'compare and contrast' goal could still be achieved.

### **5.3.1 Ensuring Data Quality and Authenticity of Perspectives**

Guba and Lincoln (2005, p.207) spoke of the validity of qualitative data in interpretive and constructivist frameworks being viewed as 'authenticity'. The concept goes to the heart of the trustworthiness of data where the researcher takes steps to ensure that he/she has captured and is appropriately representing the perspectives of the participants rather than tainting them with his/her own preconceptions and expectations. In addition, in research where participant observation methods are employed, there is always the risk of the researcher losing perspective (i.e., going native', see, for example, Flick, (2002, pp. 142-146)) as he/she becomes progressively more immersed in the context of study. Both problems can affect the quality of the data and the authenticity of the perspectives

being presented. These risks were fully acknowledged in the current research and several safeguards and practices were implemented to effectively manage those risks:

- Relying on multiple sources of data (e.g., the Vice-Chancellor, university documents, interviews with other university staff at a variety of levels) rather than just a single data source (the Vice-Chancellor);
- Ensuring observation of a wide range of different events and conversations to maximise exposure to behavioural and role enactment diversity;
- Having prescribed limits on depth of participation so that the ‘researcher attitude’ could be maintained;
- Tape recording interviews, where permitted, to ensure that the raw data were recorded faithfully;
- Where mechanical recording of observations was not possible, writing up observations and field notes as soon after observations as possible using low-inference descriptions;
- Cross-checking across data sources to look for convergence as well as divergence in perspectives to ensure exposure to more diverse and complex viewpoints; and
- Limiting the total time immersed in the setting so that the chances of going native were minimised.
- On one occasion, during an extended observation period, the researcher lost ‘researcher focus’. This was detected in the reflection at the end of the day during diary notes of the process. This was a salient lesson early in the research that reinforced the need for constant reflection and examination after each data gathering process.

### **5.3.2 Case Study Sampling Strategy**

Sampling methods utilised in this research do not follow traditional normative approaches which often rely on size and randomness to satisfy statistical and generalisation requirements. Thus, non-probability sampling was deemed most salient to the specific needs of gaining access to Vice-Chancellors who would be prepared to participate in the study. Two universities were selected in the present

study. Case Study (A) was selected using a convenience approach (Berg, 2004, p.35) after the researcher contacted a Vice-Chancellor who was visiting the University of New England in early 2000. The researcher arranged an appointment and after explaining the research conceptual framework, the Vice-Chancellor offered his university as the first case study. A significant advantage was gained through this initial meeting as the researcher was able to use this connection to the Vice-Chancellor as a means of negating “gatekeeper” resistance (Seidman, 1998) to the research both within that institution and through my approach to other Vice-Chancellors in the Australian system. Given permission to use this Vice-Chancellor’s name enhanced the researcher’s credibility which appeared to be validated in the eyes of all who were approached over the course of the research project resulting in no refusals to participate in the research. Specific details about each university are provided in section 5.6 below. The researcher spent a total of two weeks (two one week visits) on site from November to December 2000. Following data collection the Vice-Chancellor suggested a number of other potential Vice-Chancellors who may be willing to participate. Two Group of Eight (GO8) Vice-Chancellors were approached, and after both expressed a willingness to participate, both had to withdraw due to internal issues relating to structural changes to their organisations. A third Vice-Chancellor was recommended and his university agreed to participate.

Case study (B) was visited on three separate occasions from February 2003, May 2003, and July 2004 for a total of three weeks on site.

In addition to the two case study universities, a number of current and former Vice-Chancellors were interviewed, with two of these Vice-Chancellors interviewed twice (n=7). These Vice-Chancellors were either currently serving or retired. They were invited to participate in the research after being referred to the researcher’s attention by the case-study Vice-Chancellors, or were available to the researcher when they were visiting the researcher’s University. One interviewee asked the researcher to contact him after we had met at a function being held by case-study University (A). Three of these interviewees had been, or were current, Vice-Chancellor of GO8 institutions and the others had been, or were, Vice-Chancellors of smaller institutions either regional or capital city based. Further, senior staff of DEST and

the AVCC were also included in the research interview cohort (n=3). These interviewees were chosen as they had significant experience in working with all the universities in the Australian system. The total number of people interviewed for the research was 45 with a total of 52 interviews. The sampling strategy for selecting interviewees was based on a judgment sampling approach. This method was chosen as it “involves the choice of subjects who are in the best position to provide the information required” (Cavana et al., 2001, p.263).

Case study (A) comprised 16 (n=16) interviewees and 17 interviews in total, which included the Vice-Chancellor (2 interviews and e-mail follow-up questions), chancellor, senior executive and academics, council members, staff union representatives, and student representatives. The partner of the Vice-Chancellor was also interviewed. All were selected based on their likely interaction with the Vice-Chancellor on a regular basis.

Case study (B) comprised 19 (n=19) interviewees and 23 interviews in total which included the Vice-Chancellor (5 interviews), chancellor, senior executive, council members, staff union representatives, and student representatives. The Vice-Chancellor was interviewed on five occasions over the period of the three site visits, and subsequently in 2006.

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim into Microsoft® Word 2003. Transcription was undertaken by a professional transcriptionist for all but four interviews. The transcriptionist was provided with detailed instructions on the rules to be followed for transcription and this document is included as Appendix (2). This was done in order to maximise consistency of transcription. The researcher then randomly selected 10 interview transcripts for accuracy checks. No major inaccuracies were identified in this examination.

### **5.3.3 Case Study Observational Method**

Mintzberg’s (1975) comments, reported in the previous chapter, regarding differences in reported and observed behaviour, are relevant to the methodological approach to the current research. Essentially Mintzberg suggested that managers will tell the researcher they do one thing, but when observed in action, do something

quite different. This is a simplistic way of arguing for observational data gathering to supplement interview data. According to Patton (1980, p.30) direct participation in and observation of the behaviour of interest allows the researcher to more fully grasp the complexity of the situation.

Angrosino states that observation has been described as a fundamental base for all research methods and has been the mainstay of ethnographic studies (2005, p.729). Bogdan and Taylor, however, characterise participant observation as a "...period of intense social interaction between the researcher and the subjects, in the milieu of the latter" (1975, p.5). The observer, they suggest, immerse themselves in the lives of the people they are studying, speaking, joking, empathising, and sharing experiences with them (p.5). The observational technique adopted in the current research does not fit the definition of complete participant observation but rather is characterised by Patton's definition of the observer as a participant (1980, p.132). Here, the observer as participant does not live the shared experiences that a participant observer will do. Rather, this observer role reflects the status of the researcher as an outsider, one who observes openly, but who does not engage in the level of interaction described above. This role may allow maximum freedom to gather data but with maximum restrictions on what can be reported, according to Patton (1980, p.132).

This choice of depth of participation (observer as participant) has been determined by two important considerations. The first point is that the researcher whilst observing role behaviour in natural settings, wished to minimise the possibility of influencing the behaviour of the role participants. As Patton notes, "...people may behave quite differently when they are being observed compared with how they behave if they are not aware they are being observed" (1980, p.130). Admittedly, any observational approach runs the risk of changing the behaviour under investigation. However, by being somewhat distanced from the participants allows the researcher some degree of opportunity to blend in with the furniture and perhaps to reduce the risk of 'going native' or losing researcher perspective. Lofland and Lofland (1984, p.34) suggest this is an important issue to consider when spending lengthy periods of time in close proximity to people in the field where the researcher may be "tempted to cease all research and fully join the group".

The second issue concerns the problematic nature of the status differences between those observed and the observer. This research has required the researcher to interview and observe people from a variety of role perspectives in higher education, but they have almost all occupied significant positions of power in either bureaucratic or senior university roles. Full-depth participant observation, therefore, was deemed simply not feasible. Preliminary, informal discussions with a number of currently serving or former Vice-Chancellors confirmed that opportunities to undertake observations would likely be extremely limited given the sensitive nature of much of their work.

Notwithstanding these issues, there are a number of advantages to undertaking observational studies, according to Patton (1980). These include: enhancing the researcher's understanding of the particular situational context; an enhancement of the inductive process through learning "in situ"; the researcher may observe things the participants may miss; issues may arise that are not revealed by interview due to withholding by the interviewee, such as non-verbal communication signals between people; the researcher can move beyond the selective perceptions of the people under study by seeking confirmatory or contrary behaviours; and finally, the process of observation adds another reflective dimension for the researcher to make sense of the issue under investigation (Patton, 1980, pp.124-5).

The observational approach undertaken in this research involved the researcher firstly obtaining permission from the Vice-Chancellor to undertake unobtrusive observation of day-to-day role activity. Indeed the Vice-Chancellor of Case Study (a) volunteered this access. The researcher was then invited to "shadow" the Vice-Chancellor in a range of activities throughout the course of a two-week period. The range of situations and contexts that were observed are summarised in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 below.

The researcher obtained permission from the Vice-Chancellor to attend meetings or discussions, either one to one, small group (senior executive) or larger groups (Council meetings, Board meetings). These meetings ranged from "catch ups" with staff to advise on important issues under consideration, to extremely sensitive meetings where significant strategic initiatives were on the agenda. In the case of

university (A) one such meeting involved a high-level political discussion regarding a significant new initiative being developed, that required three universities sharing in the delivery of the program. In the case of university (B) one such meeting involved discussion relating to setting up a campus in another capital city. In the latter, one very senior member of the executive, expressed concern at the researcher's attendance. The Vice-Chancellor intervened on this occasion to support the attendance of the researcher and the meeting proceeded.

The researcher was not allowed to record notes during observations in University A. In these circumstances, the researcher immediately went to a private office to record all thoughts and recall of the interactions of the meetings. In these cases the researcher wrote down all that could be recalled. Personal reflections and comments were also recorded at these times for future analysis and follow-up. University B had fewer concerns regarding note taking during observation but on some occasions this researcher did not take this opportunity, for example in the sensitive case discussed above. The researcher, wherever possible, chose a location in the room that allowed line of sight with as many of the participants as possible, usually in a corner location. This was the case for both universities. On a number of occasions, however, for case study B the researcher was invited to sit at the table with the group. An issue arose from this, however, when on one occasion, the participants began to ask questions of, and seek contributions from, the researcher. Following this, the researcher declined further invitations to 'join the group' at the table.

In both universities, all opportunities to observe situations were at the invitation of the Vice-Chancellor and were co-ordinated through the Vice-Chancellors' Personal Assistants. The Vice-Chancellors always introduced the researcher to the meetings and explained why he was there. This frequently drew wry comments from participants as to their interest in the research. However, once meetings commenced it became apparent that the researcher's attendance was quickly forgotten on most occasions. The following examples illustrate the range of situations and contexts observed at both universities during the course of the research:

**Table 5.2 Examples of Observed Situations and Activities University (A)**

Date	Situation and number present	Time	Notes
6/11/2000	Cocktail Function VC residence after 5:00 (30 guests). Full catering.	1 ½ hours	VC and partner work the room continually. Warm and friendly. Buzz in the room. VC talks about the house and its designer. VC meets everybody.
7/11/2000	Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (9 members of senior executive)	2 hours	Clear evidence senior manager responsible for corporate affairs holds significant power and much deference to this person's opinion. One senior member (academic background) showed body language evidence that not enamoured to this senior manager. Confidential meeting and some discussion of a major strategic initiative in pipeline. VC very inclusive in the discussion.
8/11/2000	Short-Listing meeting for Head of a School. (5 present, including VC).	1 ½ hours	Very difficult meeting due to problems with school and its history. Much discussion regarding best strategy and kind of person needed. Very political meeting. VC continually reinforces the University values and links this to appointment.
8/11/2000	Accompany VC to off-campus (he drives) meeting of a national body in education domain. (approx 16 in room with VC as Chair)	1 ½ hour	VC extremely open and inclusive in this meeting. Budget issues and some events associated with this body discussed. Very positive mood in the room and they were initially bemused by my presence. Two members engage VC in confidential matter immediately after meeting and this is a regular occurrence when VC's in both case studies attend meetings. VC discusses some critical issues to me en-route regarding his style of leadership. Reported in detail elsewhere
9/11/2000	VC and senior Federal Government bureaucrat in discussion of an extremely sensitive nature.	1 hour	VC assured bureaucrat that I was to be trusted. Political and sensitive matter involving Federal Government, State Governments and other universities – possible collaborative venture.
5/12/2000 Second site visit	Second visit to University. Attend Council Meeting (approximately 20)	2 hours	VC and Chancellor have excellent rapport and meeting flows very smoothly. Media attend!
5/12/2000	Council Christmas Dinner at VC's residence (approximately 20)	2 ½ hours	Spectacular setting and VC and partner play extremely warm hosts. I sit at seat next to VC at dinner and receive much advice as to my research and other possible universities to include.
NB. 12 occasions or activities were attended by the researcher for university (A) in total amounting to 20 hours of observed data gathering including informal observations in the Vice-Chancellor's offices.			

**Table 5.3 Examples of Observed Situations and Activities University (B)**

Date	Situation and number present	Time	Notes
18/02/2003	8:30am Senior Staff Meeting (7 staff)	½ hour	VC provided an update on a number of strategic matters. Two new managers attending for first time. Gender balance here Four female 3 male. VC reinforces value and tone of institution.
18/02/2003	Planning and Management meeting (approximately 22 staff attend).	2 hours	Strategic focus in this meeting. Quite formal process with complex agenda. VC reinforces value and tone of institution. Some political sensitivity regarding funding of initiatives and concern for Council reaction. Most of the participation is conducted by a core group of VC, Business Manager, Executive Deans.
19/02/2003	Heads of School “Coffee” Meeting (7 present including VC).	½ hour	Informal – no agenda. VC very welcoming and relaxed. Chance for people to raise complaints. One difficult issue raised and thrown around for comment. Very good opportunity for VC to get a feel for what is happening out on campus.
19/02/2003	Council Meeting (open).  (Approximately 35 people present including support staff for VC)	2 ½ hours	Deputy Chancellor in Chair.  Number of senior executive present including Executive Deans, Pro VC’s, Finance and Executive General Manager.  First hour mostly focused on financial performance of institution with one member clearly aggressive about some of the University’s practice.  Resembled a “home” and “away” match with Council being the outsiders (away team) and the VC and his team the “home team”.
5/5/2003  Second site visit	9:30 am Diary Meeting with VC staff (4 people)	¼ hour	Busy week with a funeral requiring a change of some appointments. Executive Assistant and Personal Assistant go through diary in detail and all are up to speed on background to weeks meetings. Travel arrangements also a topic. There is lots of travel in this role. VC keeps asking, “why am I there?” or “Do I need to make a speech?”. Executive Assistant crucial here. One very confidential meeting regarding a staff member to be kept low key and out of public commentary.

<b>Table 5.3 Continued</b>			
5/5/2003	10:30am meeting with one Executive Dean	1 hour	Specific staff matters discussed and not for publication. Exec Dean's performance bonus discussed and bonus confirmed. Some discussion on an injection of private \$\$ into Faculty is good news. Bad news is some departments are in serious deficit and discussion on strategies in confidence. Exec Dean asked for advice on what would be priorities for deficit departments and VC gave an unequivocal message in terms of priorities. A number of issues laid out by Exec Dean. "Here is situation. Here are options. I think we should do this. What do you think?". VC gave impression of being very much on top of the institution and displayed detailed knowledge of the issues raised.
5/5/2003	VC meeting with Student Association representatives. Executive Assistant to VC in attendance (5 people in total)	½ hour	VC had received written petition complaining about student fees. He told them he wanted to discuss the issues face to face prior to replying formally. Executive Assistant extremely busy with note taking. I questioned her later re this and she admitted that she did not want VC to be miss-interpreted in this meeting. Again, VC demonstrated extremely well briefed for this meeting. Tone was very relaxed and open.
13/7/2004 Third site visit	Planning and Management Meeting (10 participants)	2 hours	Major discussion on the internal distribution of \$\$ to Faculties. This was an extremely difficult and sensitive meeting with some Executive Deans arguing for a more equitable distribution of \$\$\$. Clearly some winners and losers in the model. VC facilitated input from all participants in the room. Participation was vigorous but not aggressive. Tone of mutual respect and concern for the losers. I asked one of the Executive Deans after the meeting about the mood and he confirmed that this university does not accept aggressive or hysterical displays in meetings. Very tough meeting to Chair – but VC in complete control.
NB. A total of 26 occasions or activities were attended by the researcher for university (B) in total amounting to 60 hours of observed data gathering including informal observations in the Vice-Chancellor's offices.			

### 5.3.4 Case Study Interview Method

Another cornerstone of the methodology in this research is the in-depth interview. "The major purpose of an in-depth ethnographic interview is to learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed...In this approach the researcher asks those who are studied to become the teachers and to instruct her or him in the ways of life they find meaningful" (Ely et al., 1991, p.58). The interview is a conversation and thus allows the participants to explore shared meanings in the

context of a constructivist ontology. “The subjects not only answer questions prepared by an expert, but themselves formulate in a dialogue their own conceptions of their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p.11).

The interview approach in this research was largely unstructured with one or two opening questions designed to elicit responses pertaining to the interviewee’s definition of their role. This took the form of what Seidman calls the “grand tour” question (Seidman, 1998, p.69). This form of question is specifically targeted at gaining insights from the participant such that they can explain “what was that like for them” (Seidman, 1998, p.70). For example, a common opening question was “Could you please tell me about your current role?” The researcher then allowed the interviewee time and space to respond in detail about their role. The researcher would interrupt only to seek clarification of a particular point or to probe further to elicit more detailed information on a specific issue which had arisen. The interviews ranged in duration from 45 minutes to 90 minutes with the average time per interview being 60 minutes.

This researcher has been trained in interviewing techniques when formerly employed as a recruitment manager in a university. Importantly the researcher adopted a relatively non-intrusive (but active) listening style. According to Ely et al., the interviewer should “LISTEN, LISTEN – and LISTEN MORE” (1991, p.66). Lofland and Lofland refer to this interviewing style as “intensive interviewing”, taking the form of an “unstructured interview” or a “guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis” (1984, p.12). All interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants. Lofland and Lofland argued this is essential to successful interviewing as it allows the researcher to devote their full attention to the subject and thus engage in active listening processes. This approach also allows the researcher to maintain eye contact and maintain rapport with the subject. Thus, opportunities for clarification and probing are enhanced due to the researcher not being distracted by note taking.

Glaser (1998) argued, however, that taping should not be undertaken in a grounded theory design. He argues there is no need for a complete record of the conversation.

Instead he argues theoretical completeness can be attained from notes taken after the interview (1998, p.107). Glaser qualified this rule by stating it should apply to solo researchers in the field but may be less critical for research teams where there may be no other source of data. Glaser's primary arguments for not taping interviews include its tendency to delimit the research by forcing data. Secondly, he argued it forestalls theoretical sampling. In other words, the researcher will necessarily delay their theoretical development and thus lose contextual immediacy. This researcher, however, agreed with Lofland and Lofland's arguments for greater efficiency and accuracy. Further, this researcher chose to tape record because of the significant importance of the people involved in the research and the very limited opportunities the researcher had to gain access to their time. Interviews were conducted in the offices, or residences of the Vice-Chancellors to ensure they were able to feel comfortable during the discussion.

### **5.3.5 Print-Based Content Analysis**

To add further evidence to the data collection and to increase the convincingness of the interpretation, a range of print or electronic based documentation was also evaluated in the light of the Vice-Chancellor roles. Trim suggests that:

The researcher can use discourse analysis to fully comprehend the meaning conveyed in the various documents provided by personnel within the department/organization. This allows the researcher to gain evidence, and to understand and interpret the context...in which it is set...the strength of documentary analysis is that it can be used in order to make cross-references with data obtained from in-depth interviews for example...and this reinforces the concept of validity and reliability (Trim, 2001, pp.38-9).

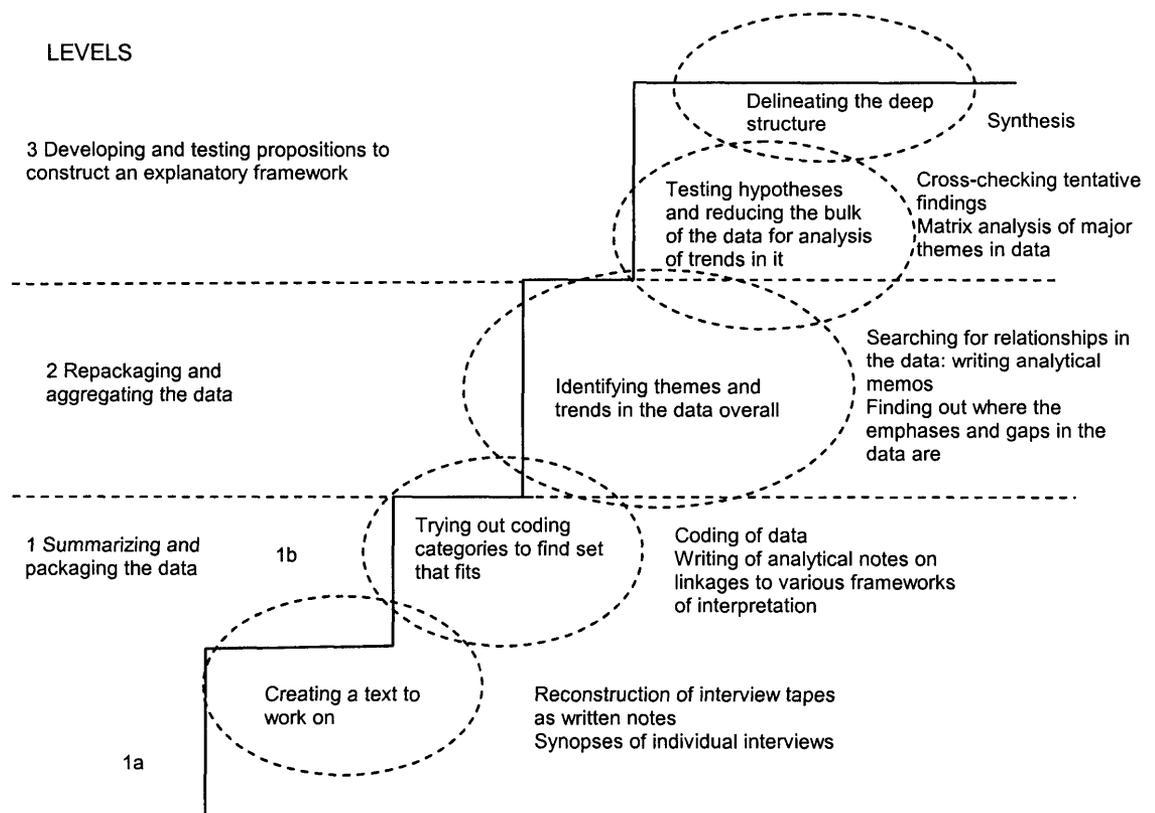
Hodder (2000, p.703) argues that text can be distinguished on a number of dimensions. Records, he argues, are documents that represent some formal transaction such as marriage certificates, building contracts, or licenses whereas documents represent a more personal perspective and could take the form of speeches, diaries, letters, or memos. The interpretation of these forms of

communication, therefore, needs to recognise the different layers of meaning associated with both. 'Forms' may be relatively unambiguous but 'documents' may reflect very different levels of meaning depending on the writer's and the reader's perspectives. Nevertheless, both types of written information are embedded within a particular cultural context and therefore have value in helping to explain meaning particular to a specific case.

Written material included in this part of the methodology encompassed position descriptions, university acts and by-laws describing the role of the Vice-Chancellors, official speeches made by Vice-Chancellors, various government documents relevant to the role of Vice-Chancellors including the, university strategic plans, articles written for university internal communication avenues (for example, university bulletins or newsletters), and press releases about or by Vice-Chancellors in various mediums. A list of 'forms' and 'documents' accessed for this research are included in the appendices 4 and 5.

#### **5.4 Analytic Approach**

All data collected for this thesis has been analysed using Yin's (2003a) and Miles and Huberman's (1994) recommendations based on Carney (1990). Figure 5.1 (below illustrates this analytic strategy). All interview transcripts were entered into the qualitative research software N6 (QSR, 2002) for analysis. N6 is a qualitative data management package developed in Australia and is now accepted as a leading software tool to aid researchers in managing large sets of text based data (Lavery & Hansen, 2003). The software is compatible with Microsoft® Word 2003 and various other software packages such as Inspiration 7 and its mapping capabilities.



**Figure 5.1 The Ladder of Analytical Abstraction (Adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.92)**

This figure represents a traditional qualitative data analysis process and suits the exploratory nature of the current research. The analytic process then followed the stages in the Figure 5.1 above. Interview transcripts were read for the detection of specific words or phrases that appeared relevant to the research. For example, any comments pertaining to the “personality” of the Vice-Chancellor were coded under categories relevant to the “Personal Attributes” of the role-theory model. For example “openness” was a frequent descriptor attributed to both Vice-Chancellors.

A continual movement through the data seeking related terms that fit the role-theory model were coded accordingly. Words or phrases that related to an emerging theme, for example, *walking the walk* were merged to help explain particular role-enactment behaviours that influence the behaviour or perceptions of others in the institution. While not strictly following the rules of inductive analysis the researcher was seeking the “patterns, themes, and categories” (Patton, 1980, p. 306) that emerged from the data. Finally, the key themes were determined once data saturation had occurred for the researcher.

#### 5.4.1 Within-Case and Between-Case Analysis

The research of the case studies involves both within case and between case data analysis. It is important to compare and contrast the key issues, as they emerge, in the research process. While not seeking generalisation in this research, evidence of consistent themes emerging may add convincingness to the research findings, according to a number of authors (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003a). Thus details that distinguish each institution are important, but, evidence for similarities between institutions may also reflect rigor in the research process and add credibility to the findings.

#### 5.5 The Case Study Settings and Contexts

The following information summarises the key characteristics of each institution. As indicated earlier, the institutions have been disguised to assist in maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Nevertheless, the institution profiles are as explicit as is possible to meet these ethical requirements.

##### 5.5.1 Case Study A

Case study A was a moderate sized institution (approximately 10,000 EFSTU) at the time of the research site visits. This institution was a former CAE that assumed full university status as a consequence of the Dawkins reforms of the late 1980s in Australia. Its staff profile at the time of the research included approximately 350 fractional and full-time academic staff and approximately 480 fractional and full-time general staff. The Vice-Chancellor had been in office for a period between five (5) and ten (10) years. Key information regarding this institution is summarised in Table 5.4, Table 5.5 summarises the range of people interviewed from this institution by role.

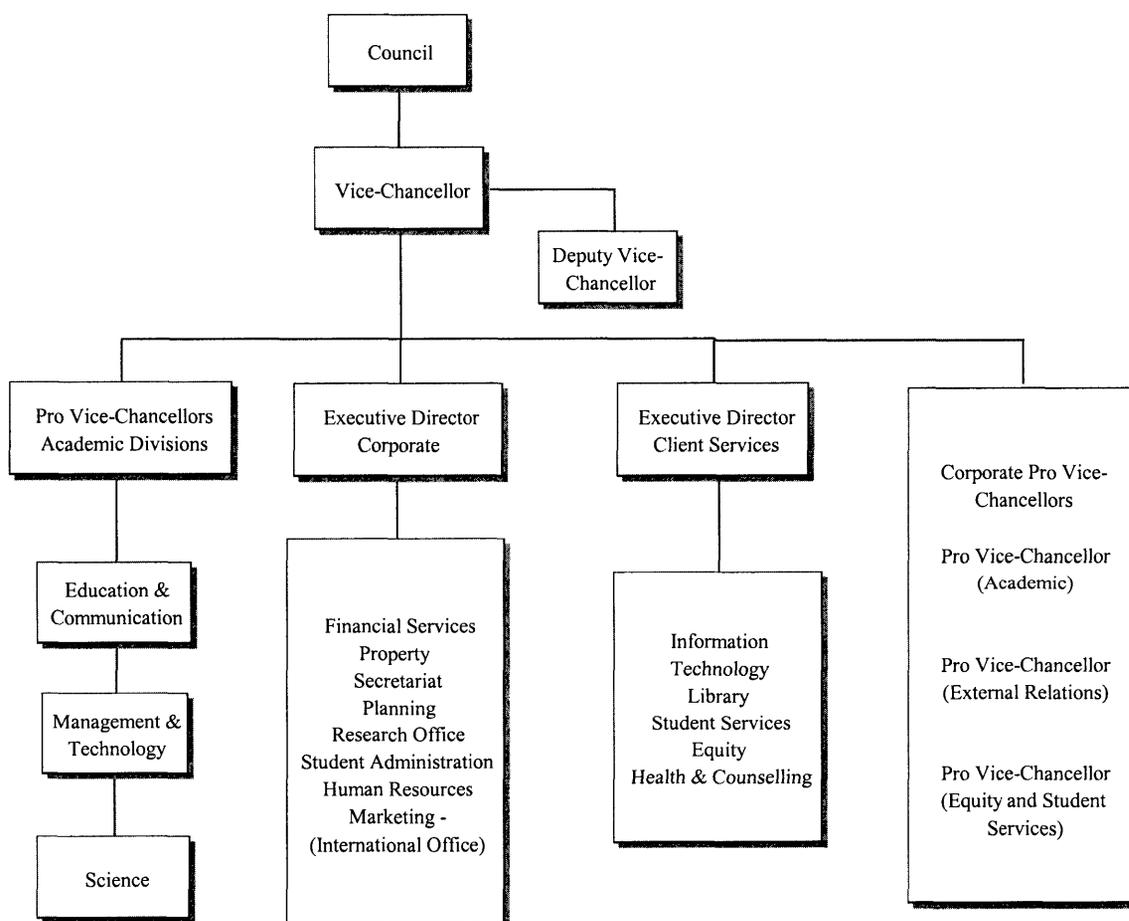
**Table 5.4 Case Study A - Institutional Profile as at 2000-2001**

EFTSU	10000 students
Staff Profile	Academic 350 General 480
Single or Multi Campus	Single (*subsequently multiple)
Annual Income	A\$120M
Established	1967 (CAE) 1989 University Status

**Table 5.5 Interviewees by Role or Position - Case Study A**

Role – Organisation Position	Gender	Pseudonym
Vice-Chancellor	Male	VCa
Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Female	Mary
Chancellor	Female	Sue
Senior Manager	Male	Greg
Chair Academic Board	Female	Jan
Pro Vice-Chancellor	Male	Doug
General Staff Council Representative	Female	Sally
Senior Manager	Male	Mark
Senior Manager	Male	Rob
Senior Academic Council Representative	Male	Chen
Personal Assistant to Vice-Chancellor	Female	Joan
Executive Officer to Vice-Chancellor	Female	Felicity
Manager Student Association	Male	Ray
Partner of Vice-Chancellor	Female	Ann
Senior Manager	Male	Steve

The organisational structure (with some titles changed for anonymity purposes) is shown in Figure 5.2 below.



**Figure 5.2 Case Study A - Organisational Structure 2000-2001**

### 5.5.2 Case Study B

Case study B was a large institution (approximately 30,000+ EFSTU) at the time of the research site visits. This institution was established as a university in the mid 1980s. Its staff profile at the time of the research included approximately 1100 fractional and full-time academic staff and approximately 1500 fractional and full-time general staff. The Vice-Chancellor had been in office for a period between five (5) and ten (10) years. The following tables detail further organisational context.

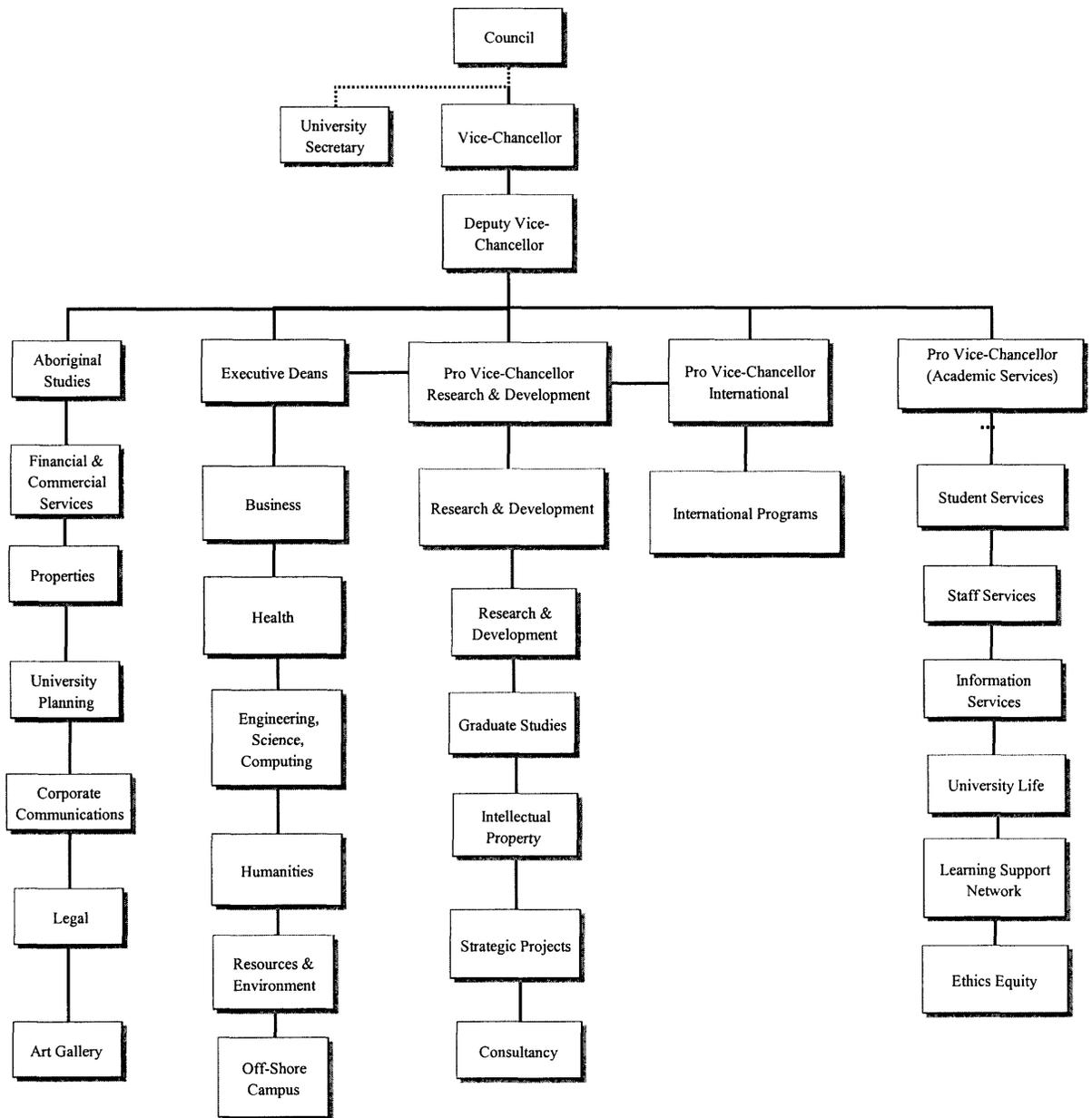
**Table 5.6 Case Study B - Institutional Profile as at 2003-2004.**

EFTSU	31,000 students
Staff Profile	Academic 1100 General 1500
Single or Multi Campus	Multiple including off-shore
Annual Income	A\$360M
Established	1988 University Status

**Table 5.7. Interviewees by Role or Position - Case Study B.**

Role – Organisation Position	Gender	Pseudonyms
Vice-Chancellor	Male	VCb
Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Female	Alison
Chancellor	Male	Philip
Senior Manager	Female	Jackie
Pro Vice-Chancellor	Female	Julia
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research	Male	Michael
General Staff Council Representative	Female	Martina
Senior Manager	Female	Helen
Senior Manager	Female	Sharon
Senior Academic	Male	Claude
Personal Assistant to Vice-Chancellor	Female	Linley
Executive Officer to Vice-Chancellor	Female	Tracey
Student Association President	Male	Nigel
Executive Dean (x 3 Deans)	All male	Paul Matthew Noel
Senior Manager	Male	Krzytov
Adjunct Professor	Male	Peter

The organisational structure for Case Study B (with some titles changed for anonymity purposes) is shown in Figure 5.3.



**Figure 5.3 Case Study B - Organisational Structure 2003-2004**

Discussion now turns to the data and analysis for the individual case study institutions.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RESEARCH FINDINGS: CASE STUDY A

#### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the results obtained from three sources of data from the first case study University (University A). These are unstructured depth interviews, non-participant observation, and the analysis of organisational documentation such as position descriptions, Acts and By-Laws, and various published documents either from the Vice-Chancellor or from other relevant organisations such as the Remuneration Tribunal. The Chapter presents the results of analyses in case-study University A and its individual context and then brings together the common threads of role-sending and role-enactment patterns evident from the research.

#### 6.1 Context for the Case Study

The demographic and organisational details in the methods chapter provide a somewhat artificial picture of the institution. Each case study report, therefore, is presented with a more personal insight into the Vice-Chancellor and his institution. This is relevant because it relates to the detailed discussion on what these people do and “how” they do it on a daily basis.

Vice-Chancellor A is an urbane, extremely accommodating and generous host. He has an extensive knowledge of Australian higher education history both from his experience within at least four universities and in his roles on various external government entities. His sense of pride in this institution stems from an understanding of its history and the significant role he has played in its growth and development. He took pride in the physical appearance of the institution and the intangible but important “tone” of the place. At the time this research was conducted it was a single campus institution (now multi) and was a compact, neat, and attractive site to visit.

The Vice-Chancellor discusses his feelings about his initial decision to accept the role in this institution in the following extract. This is a significant issue to reflect

on as it highlights, in his mind, the importance to him of having a cultural match between the Vice-Chancellor and the institution when he considered accepting the position.

VCa: I don't know if I'd even seen the advertisement. But xxx, who was the Vice-Chancellor at xxx and was on the Council body and was entrusted by the Council to find somebody. Introduced me to xxx who is my deputy and she gave a little speech. When the two of them started twisting my arm and saying why not xxx, it began increasingly to seem like a good idea. It meant that I didn't have to go back to the xxx and I didn't have to leave xxx. I had an eight year old boy and I wanted to have some say in his upbringing. If I went to xxx, there were lots of jobs there, outside the higher education system and very well paid. So I said yes and it turned out to be a splendid job because, I think, I come from the bush, I come from working class background, I'm not an establishment person. I was asked to go to Melbourne and I said to the then Chancellor, who I've known for a long time and got on well with, "I'm not an establishment person and I'm especially not a Melbourne establishment person". He said "We could make somebody like you" and I said "Yeah, but I'm not sure, I don't have any base here at all. It's not a city I've ever lived in. Anyway, I said "No".

PETER: I wonder how many people could put a spin on it. The tap on the shoulder, we'd like you to apply for this institution.

VCa: At that particular time I expected it to be as the Vice-Chancellor of the xxx. If I was in the market at another time I would have taken it more seriously. Truly, I was Chairman of the Board, Chairman of the xxx, I was a member of xxx, member of the xxx...so why would I go to Melbourne? That was late '86. I don't want to sound too self aware but, having come here and been here, it didn't take me more than 6 months to think, this is the right place, this is xxx again. When I went to xxx, you were almost giggled at by Sydney. Being a loyalist, I was pretty offended. So that Sydney was one place I would never have gone to. Quite literally. Even though when xxx did, people rang up and said you will apply, you will apply, I said No. It's not my place at all. I get along well with a lot of people there but it's inappropriate. This is an appropriate match for my background. I think my talents would work almost anywhere but emotionally this is a lovely place. (VCa: lines 185-200)

As the following discussion often illuminates, this Vice-Chancellor is extraordinarily cognisant of the critical relationship between his personal values and the institution that he had led. This links directly to the way this Vice-Chancellor operated within

his institution and can help explain the particular forms of role-sending and role-enactment observed in this research.

This case study University is the smaller of the two institutions and in many respects acted as a learning opportunity for the researcher in terms of future practice for case study B. This does not diminish the findings from this institution but does recognise the difficult nature of conducting qualitative research in field settings. Figure 6.1 (below) displays the conceptual structure of the collected data for University A and the criteria for evaluating its content.

In undertaking the analyses for this research a number of important factors were considered. It is important to recognise that the role-theory model developed by Katz and Kahn is essentially a communication model (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p.190). But, it is more than just communication, according to Katz and Kahn. They also suggest that 'influence' is also a key objective of role-sending (1978, p.190). Further, Katz and Kahn were interested in evaluating role-sending through a range of criteria including, whether the signals were prescriptive or proscriptive, what magnitude or strength were the signals, specificity (how clear or detailed), intensity (how much freedom does the receiver have to comply or how much independence do they have), and range (or how varied are the contexts the signals may apply) (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p.191).

The current research has been able to shed light on a number of processes that occur during the day activities of Vice-Chancellor A based on their criteria (reflected at the bottom of Figure 6.1). Communication takes the form of a complex range of input and output. Formal, informal, written, spoken, e-mailed, all form an on going and complex interplay that determines the role of Vice-Chancellor. Each component of the Katz and Kahn model is discussed below in light of the data generated by this research. In addition, information that arises from extra-organisational contexts is also considered.

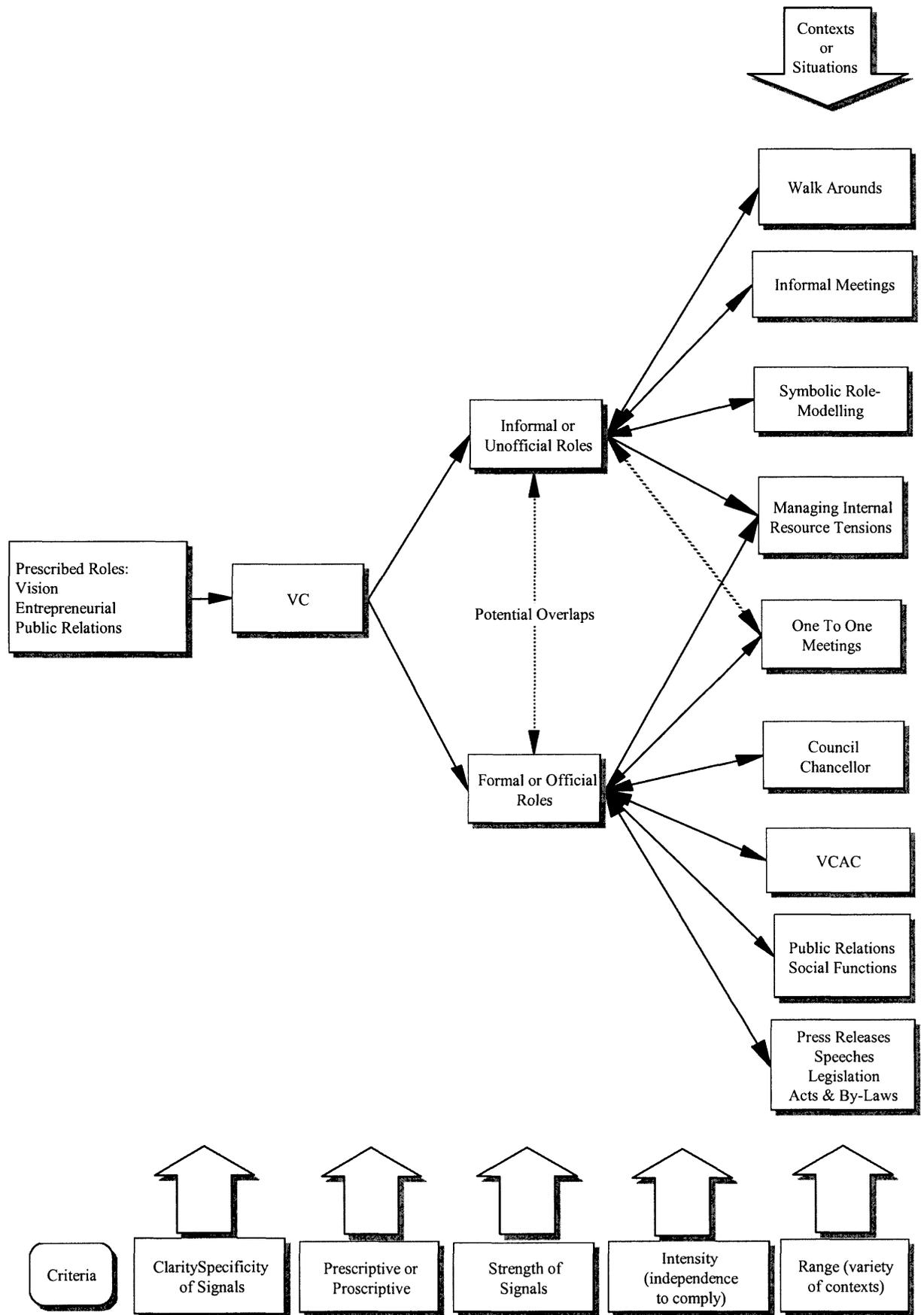


Figure 6.1. Within Case Results Framework - University A

As highlighted in the previous chapter, this University is a post-Dawkins institution, having existed prior to that as a CAE. Its annual reports for the period of data gathering indicate a steady growth in research activity. Its strategic plan for this period identified the need to: (a) attract larger numbers of postgraduate students; (b) attract larger numbers of international students; and, (c) expand the number of tasks undertaken for its communities. The University has adopted a strategy of becoming identified by the region as (its) University, deliberately avoiding open competition with the larger and more prestigious institutions in the area. The Vice-Chancellor has identified this as a critical competitive advantage. This is partly exemplified in the University's strategic plan (excerpts below) that includes specific value statements supporting the strategies.

The institution operated on a fiscal model designed to bring in an annual surplus of at least 2% to ensure growth opportunities would receive adequate funding. The University sought to produce graduates who would be capable professionals in a range of education, science, and technology domains.

**Table 6.1 University A - Strategic Plan Extract**

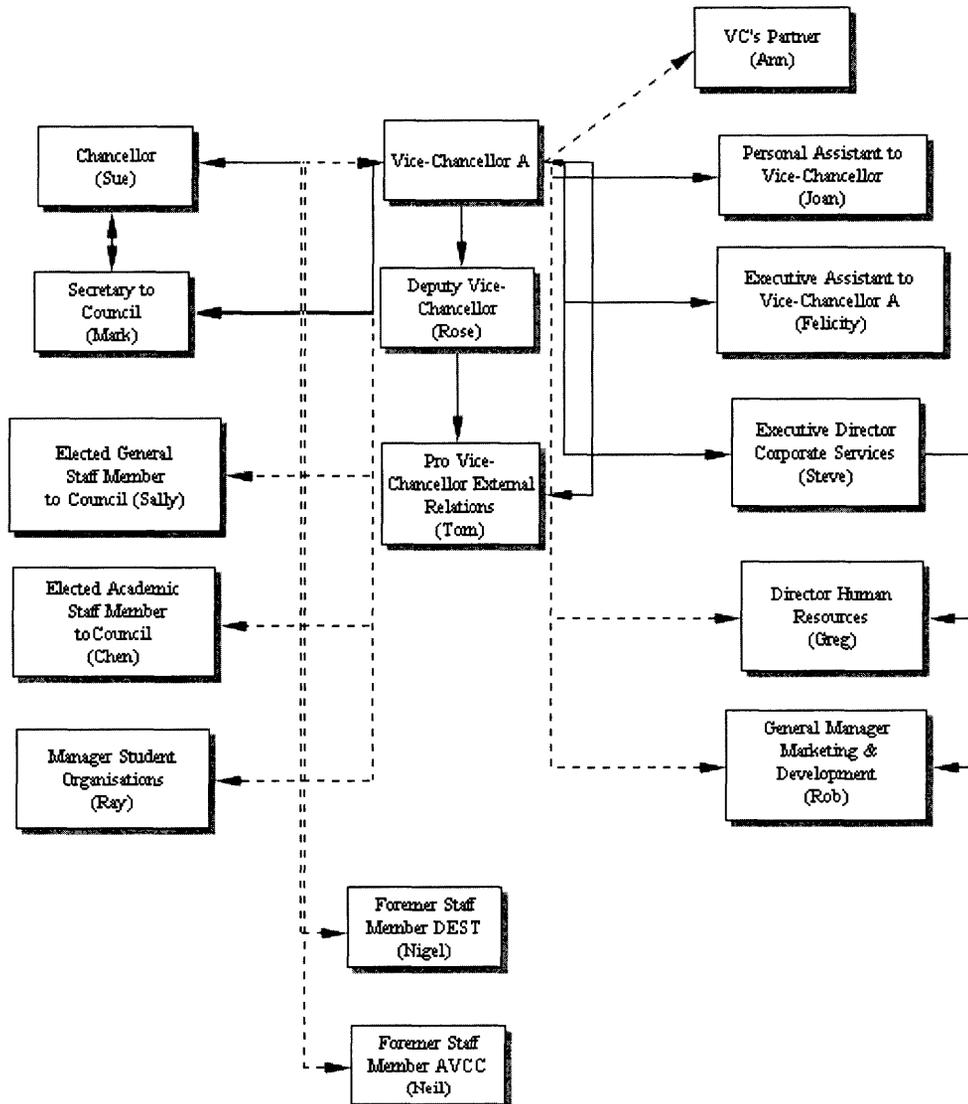
Objective 5 <sup>1</sup>	Strategies
To provide intellectual leadership and service to the professions, industry, governments and their wider society, particularly in the [local] region.	<p>1. Continue to develop linkages and co-operation with industry, other [local] educational institutions, the [State] and Commonwealth public sectors, and with local and national professional associations</p> <p>3. Form close ties with other [State] cultural institutions, contribute to the economic, cultural and social development of the region.</p>

The central campus was modelled on a small city centre with retail and service facilities all based in the central hub. This had the effect of making the place appear vibrant and busy. Most of the teaching and research buildings were within very easy walking distance to this hub. The buildings and grounds appeared to be in extremely

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons of confidentiality the full reference for these articles is not revealed here but can be obtained from the researcher on request.

good condition and the Vice-Chancellor mentioned in interview that this was a source of pleasure to him. The Vice-Chancellor has been the longest serving in this role since the institution achieved University status. Finally, Figure 6.2 illustrates the individuals interviewed for this research and their relationships with VCa.



**Figure 6.2 Interviewees for Case Study A. (solid lines depict a formal organisational relationship; dashed lines indicate an indirect relationship or relationship with non-staff member)**

## 6.2 Key Themes from Data

Role sending is a multi-directional set of processes coming both into the office of Vice-Chancellor and emanating from it. These processes are both complex and pervasive. In shadowing the Vice-Chancellor, it became apparent that Sloper's (1994a) assessment of their time being extremely busy was perhaps an

understatement and did not recognise the sheer diversity and volume of tasks that a Vice-Chancellor was required to attend to in a given day. This analysis is principally based on the time spent in the company of the Vice-Chancellor during the day to day activity in his role performance. The observational data have been invaluable in enabling the researcher to examine the “how” question of the role-sending and role-enactment. This is perhaps the area of most value from this research and much of the ensuing discussion reports on the observed behaviours and the various role-enactment issues pertaining to these. This point will be taken up further in the conclusions chapter. Due to the relative inexperience of the researcher, the process of observation and access to opportunities were more limited during the first case study research. This part of the research project has been illuminating, both from a methodological perspective and also in terms of helping unpack and explain the performance of the Vice-Chancellor. The structure of the remaining sections in this chapter focus on three broad areas of role-enactment, “Prescribed Roles”, “Internal Role-Enactment Processes” and “Boundary Spanning Role-Enactment Processes”.

### **6.3 Prescribed Roles**

The following data come from interviews with stakeholders within the institution that relate to role-sender expectations of the types of role-enactment that the Vice-Chancellor is expected to perform. The purpose of including these data is both to illustrate role-sending specificity or clarity and to some degree the range of contexts where these behaviours can be displayed. In discussing these roles, linkages to observed behavioural examples will also be considered. It should be noted that most of the following material on prescribed roles is consistent with the existing literature on what Vice-Chancellors do.

#### **6.3.1 Setting the Vision**

The first interview conducted at University A was with the Executive Director Corporate Services. This individual carried significant power at this University as evidenced by other interview data and his observed behaviours in various meetings attended by this researcher. Nevertheless he seemed very clear about what he thought the Vice-Chancellor’s role was.

STEVE: What's my relationship with the VC? Let me talk about that. There's no doubt in my mind that my job and the job of my department is to bring to fruition the visions of the VC. You know, something like that.

PETER: Oh, right yes.

STEVE: But I expect that the VC has a vision that goes out into the future, and it is up to people like myself to try and translate some of that into reality. We can do an awful lot. Now you could (unclear) argue that we do not teach, and that is true, we don't teach, but we provide the support mechanisms for all of the academic programs, in one form or another. If we're going into China to teach, then it's up to us to have systems here that will handle the money, that will allow those students to be enrolled, so that we can identify them... so there is a support role for that strategic direction. So, it's up to us as a division to be able to do that. The VC, as he has done, says this is the direction we are going to go. It is there on three principles that he has enunciated. It is up to my division and myself to work out how we could best serve that, facilitate it to work. (Steve: lines 93-103)

Steve continued in this vein, portraying a somewhat heroic image of the Vice-Chancellor. In doing this, however, he continually reinforced the imperative for the rest of the institution to support the leader's vision.

I think the VC is actually out there in front, blazing the direction and the VC needs to ensure that the major organs of the University are not trying to take the [unclear] down another path. They are probably actually following broadly the direction the VC is going and the herding of cats comes from others. It comes from people like myself and it comes from the PVC and division, heads of schools and we are both cats and herders. We have got to actually believe in a mission that the VC is selling, and if we believe in that then we are doing a combination of weeding and herding. Much more than the VC. In one sense I think he is much more of a leader. If the VC is into herding mode, then we are probably not going too fast, too far. I think the VC very much has to have a particular vision, which ours has. I think the VC has got to sell that vision. (Steve: lines 527-550)

This person had the capacity to provide that support, being in charge of most of the administrative support services at the University, including human resources and student services. There was an unequivocal tone to this interview. This person seemed to have thought deeply about the Vice-Chancellor's role and continued throughout the interview to provide forceful responses. Others shared this opinion. The researcher spent over two hours interviewing the Vice-Chancellor's partner at the Vice-Chancellor's residence. Hers was an interesting discussion including much

detail of behind-the-scenes Vice-Chancellor issues, some of which are discussed in subsequent sections. The following excerpt talks about leadership but heavily relates to vision as an issue important to the Vice-Chancellor.

But when he came here they were very much needing leadership. They had had a difficult time just before and needed a focus, he was always seen as the new boy on the block. Second in every way to the [another University]. Yet as students we did not think that way. We knew we were getting a good education, as a mother I had had experience with children being at [another University], and that was a ghastly experience in every way. He was keen that this University survived and flourished, and to his enormous credit he did not ever set out to put [another University] down in any way but simply to build a new [University A] and he has done that.

He has been out and sold the place, he knows [city] well, used everything in him to make his University feel good about itself, to discourage people from comparing themselves to [another University] to their detriment but to help them to see themselves as important in their own right - the focus is different. He does not have to do that sort of thing as much any more, the pushing now is in helping academics come to terms with the new world - as it would seem to me. (Ann: lines 198-203)

This partner has a very clear sense of the ‘purpose’ or vision the Vice-Chancellor had for the place when he was appointed. As will be discussed frequently in this thesis, this Vice-Chancellor was characterised by a continual pushing of this message about how the University should act and work. How he did this is discussed with specific examples, but clearly, to have a vision, one must be able to read the landscape and the Vice-Chancellor’s partner talks a little about that in the following excerpt.

The other thing I see him doing, and he has always done it, is trying to be one step ahead of the ball game. To always have a direction, hoping that he has got it right and to have it there and be saying to them - look we were going here but I think the game is starting to turn this way so we better start going down here and if we do it now we will probably beat the rush. This new academic programme still has not worked as well as he wanted but that meant that they had far fewer problems with the transition. Judging from the lack of front page news that we’ve made, we probably have done well. And thinking of new ways of valuing staff, and I guess that is where I see part of my role, being able to have them here as another person to smile at them and give positive feedback by just knowing who they are and what they do, and say I have heard [VC] say something good

about, or I have read in... to be able to feed that back a bit is just another change to value people, which to me is hugely important.

That is how I see his role changing. Change or focus, the pace is fast all the time, and I would say 24 hours a day higher education policy is the real thing in his head...I do know a fair bit about it, I am interested in it and did work in management anyway so I was always interested in the problem without necessarily knowing who the people were but knowing what the situation was, was often an exercise for both of us to chat about it and have another perspective. He certainly used me as a sounding board for some. (Ann: lines 251-281)

Maintaining an external 'antenna' is an obvious but perhaps underestimated requirement of the role and it is emphasised here as it seems to indicate a continuous scanning of the landscape in order to endorse or redirect the vision as the Vice-Chancellor sees fit. This suggests the role may, indeed, require an almost constant attention to the external environment in order to steer the University in an appropriate direction. The Secretary to Council provided some insight into the Vice-Chancellor structuring his role in order to partly facilitate his capacity to both determine and drive the vision.

MARK: Well he chooses not to Chair Academic Board because he wants the opportunity to have input into Academic Board rather than managing it from the Chair. I guess he perceives the Chair's role to be limiting. He can't make input as Chair, in so far as he can make a positive input into issues as a member. [VC] has a very deep academic interest, has made the vision by extracting it from the notions and visions that existed for the College of Advanced Education before becoming a University, and he has built on that in a very clever and sustainable way.

PETER: For example?

MARK: If you look at the mission of the University that is published. Educating professionals - professionally. That is a very powerful but simple message, [VC] has [unclear] his Vice-Chancellorship and driven that. I mean he started off when he first came here in [year], establishing a working party to look at where we were going. He has followed that same path and all the activities of the University are built around that and enhanced it, all of the moves forward are to carry out that mission, and get it in place. [VC's] whole achievement has been to improve the standing of the University by using that simple, very broad, but strong mission. That is not just an example, but the backbone of the whole thing.

PETER: So how does he do it?

MARK: He does it because he is a good writer - he writes down his ideas; he is a good speaker and speaks his ideas; he puts his ideas into the media; he puts his ideas in front of the external community and internal community. He is very good at culminating ideas, taking ideas on board and building them into the scheme of things. [VC] does not dream it all up but gathers it and builds it into the fabric and is very good at doing that. (Mark: lines 149-159)

Mark went on to explain more about the process of developing and selling the vision for this University. This discussion very much draws attention to the energy and style of this Vice-Chancellor.

He tries to be inclusive, consult widely, get people's views and not ride rough shod over people. So it is that co-operativeness, we can do it and we can do it better than most, and will get out and do it. Build a good institution, which it is, and making a good contribution to the community by working well together. It is not just in this country, [VC] has a vision for the world, he has the view that we can make a positive contribution to the whole world. You can see that through the [research centre], which he has worked tirelessly to get up and running. A Centre that offers the programme in [centre's name], primarily as you know the cities of the world are becoming larger and larger, and there are significant problems. (Mark: lines 246-256)

Having a vision and pushing it tirelessly is one thing, but it needs an engine to drive it as Steve mentioned earlier. Getting the people with the power to help implement the vision will be a critical role. The Director of Human Resources gives some indication of this below.

So the V-C is, and I guess it's, well, I'll go back to the unique nature of them. So, I mean, my view would be that the V-C should be out there, their role is to position the institution in whatever market place you want to do it. The vision and to **allocate the resources** (researcher's emphasis) to allow that to happen. That's got to be the big thing. They are, and I think this is the case with just about all V-Cs and certainly the ones that I've worked with. As well as being this person who is guiding the ship, they're pressing a whole lot of buttons, day to day buttons. (Greg: lines 159-169)

The Vice-Chancellor appears to sit somewhere between leader and internal manager at times and the HR Director acknowledges this in the following brief excerpt. In effect, he is suggesting that the Vice-Chancellor's micro-involvement in HR may facilitate strategies to support the vision.

He also knows that he will get involved if we believe he needs to. And we probably involve him, perhaps a little bit more than I might in another environment, but I think that's healthy and I think that it allows for, I think the vision and the sense of place that he has given this place is pretty well right. So the more we can reinforce that through whatever HR interventions we have, the better off we are. (Greg: lines 370-380)

These views of the Vice-Chancellor are not just shared by the inner-sanctum of senior administrators but general staff and student leaders also support his role. The elected general staff member to Council offers the following:

Being able to communicate that vision to the University and to get the University on side to work towards achieving that vision and to be able to help set strategies and plans to achieve it. To be very active within the local and broader community, to make people in the community understand the importance of the University, try to increase the universities profile in the local, and also the broader community. These are the bigger things I would expect of a VC. (Sally: lines 59-74)

The Manager of the Student Association shared these sentiments acknowledging the role was more than just supporting internal students and academics. This interviewee gave a somewhat rambling conversation, sometimes giving an ambiguous view about the Vice-Chancellor's role. For example, he believed the Vice-Chancellor spent far too much time out of the country, yet acknowledged the importance of the Vice-Chancellor's role in generating external relationships to enhance funding opportunities. This is likely to generate ambiguous role-sending signals from the student body if Ray's view was indicative of other student members of the institution.

I think if you have a Vice-Chancellor who provides a sort of unifying force there is a vision they are all working towards, that helps the motivation, easily. I mean, a lot of people will grumble but at least they are happier, they can see where they are going and so forth. (Ray: lines 209-214)

And if you don't have the people believing it, it is doomed to failure. I think that is the role of the VC, it is really that sort of...that ## strategic planning; standing out there and saying "This is the way ahead, this is how we are going to get there. We will be better when we get there and we will all go, we will all be there together?" (Ray: lines 542-551)

The final word on this matter is addressed by the Vice-Chancellor in articulating his perception of a role requirement. It is not quite vision, according to him, but other members of the institution believe that is what it is, and it is what they expect him to do.

One is steering the ship and seeing what's coming and getting everybody to concentrate where the ship's going, it's not quite vision, and it's not management but it's somewhere between the two. Now I could smell the end of public funding years before it came. We were way ahead of every other place in the country in doing something about undergraduate curriculum. In 1994 when there was still a Labour government, we said, don't like the smell of this. (VCa: lines 352-362)

### **6.3.2 Entrepreneurial Role**

Finding funding from ever more disparate sources occupies some considerable discussion in the literature and this is an increasingly important role for the Vice-Chancellor according to the following interviewees. Contrary to expectations about potential conflicting roles here, there seemed to be a ready acknowledgement that the Vice-Chancellor was expected to be at the vanguard of fund raising activity for the institution. Again, there was a relatively consistent agreement that this was a necessary role for the Vice-Chancellor to engage in. Chen, the academic staff representative on Council, was interviewed in his home due to his need to be the child carer for the day we had scheduled an interview. A thoughtful man with many years' experience as an academic and also as an industrial relations advocate at the University, Chen provided an opportunity to seek out alternative views of the Vice-Chancellor's role, and highlighted the somewhat difficult balancing act universities are engaged in when trying to maintain credibility and make money at the same time. The following extract from his interview focuses more on the changes in the University system as a consequence of government pressures, but implicates his own University (and the Vice-Chancellor) in how they had struggled to deal with these issues. Chen highlighted the University's responses to the need to raise additional revenue. As the interview unfolded, the view by this individual was equivocal on the directions the University was headed. This point is also taken up in later discussion on managing competing internal needs.

PETER: If you put your industrial hat on, you can see the validity of that new role, the entrepreneurial role?

CHEN: Definitely. I am certainly not comfortable about how universities are going. What the government has done is push them a lot more down the entrepreneurial pathways but I think a lot of universities, and in particular mine, have over reacted to that.

PETER: Can you give me an example?

CHEN: We are mixed up in a lot of commercial activities, marginal at best, and created a huge amount of extra work for staff with little spin off. Some of it is quite questionable from a quality point of view, particularly the overseas ventures. Also some of the local contracts we have, we have effectively priced the services at the marginal cost per students rather than the full costs, which can only have a negative impact in the long term.

I have heard senior management say if we had priced it any other way we would just not get the business, and that we had to do it that way as that is what everybody else is doing. This is forcing universities into a dirty game, which is creating a lot of problems with the staffing point of view, and there is a bleeding of the good staff out of the system from those types of approaches. That is one aspect of it but it is interesting - I think the Government's intention when cutting University funding was to try and force a rationalisation of the sector.

There are a lot of universities with too broad a programme and there is another University just down the road that covers a fair amount of that, so there is possibly a need to try and rationalise those offerings a little. But there are a lot of universities, particularly ours, who responded in the wrong way to that - we decided early on that we did not want to cut anything we did and dealt with a lot of the cuts through natural attrition which essentially lead to overwork for everybody. This created a lot of stress in the system and was probably counter productive. It may have been a lot better at that time, even though a tough thing to do, to say that these couple of parts to the University are not critical to our future and not all that viable, that if we reallocate the HECS places from those parts of the University to other parts of the University, and sort out a relationship with those things. (Chen: lines 159-194)

The Vice-Chancellor's Executive Officer, with experience outside universities, agreed that the role had changed quite dramatically in this area.

They are parallel with changes in the sector. Once Vice-Chancellors had to supervise the distribution of money - that was their job, and the University's job. Money came in from the Government and the Vice-Chancellor and his/her committee supervised its distribution. The job

of the Vice-Chancellor now is to run a corporation, it has to make money, they are not just a distributor of money.

There is a product, and it is the Vice-Chancellor and their executives job to make sure they are running an organisation both as cheaply as it can, but to run as economically as possible and bringing in as much revenue as possible. Maximise what in a business you would call profit. This is a very different concept from the universities of past years. (Felicity: lines 121 – 131)

In a somewhat simplistic assessment, Ray, the Manager of the Student Association almost grudgingly admitted that the Vice-Chancellor needed to pursue other income opportunities.

RAY: The University [name] has turned around dramatically where its funding has come from over the last ten years as has the entire sector in Australia and increasingly overseas and that ....I don't know...I think it seems to be destroying what we are here to do. But that is what the Vice Chancellor has to do these days. They're out there getting money for competing with other universities and so forth.

PETER: When you say 'that is what the Vice Chancellor has to do' who makes the Vice Chancellor have to do that?

RAY: The Government. We don't have the funds though that we used to; it is as simple as that. (Ray: lines 74 – 83)

Ray was suggesting the Government is acting as an indirect role-sender in the above extract. In his view this represented a role-sending message that offered the Vice-Chancellor little alternative but to chase money from other sources. Raising money from a variety of sources may be the imperative, but that role is confronted by many obstacles, not the least is the Vice-Chancellor's capacity to negotiate with businesses on a level playing field. After all, they are dealing with business professionals whose sole purpose often is to cut the best deal for their institution's benefit. As one interviewee, Nigel, a long serving senior executive in the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) put it,

Yeah yeah, and I think they're amateurs. You know, well intentioned amateurs in some of these commercial fields so it might be a bit wrong to expect the VC to be...you know the business expert, but the VC's got to be able to pull the right group of people together and manage the team. (Nigel: lines 66 - 72)

Nigel's interview was important because he was able to provide an industry wide perspective. He knew most of the Vice-Chancellors in the system and had a number of years of experience in this area. He provided a number of insights into the problems Vice-Chancellors were encountering in their fund raising endeavours. His view was the Vice-Chancellors had to gather a high level team around them to support their goals in fund raising.

NIGEL: Yeah, and getting, working of the right incentives um and getting the right people in, you know getting the right people around. I think probably one of the things that's gonna happen is that more broadly is that the Vice-Chancellor role will move I think for some institutions more down the American road where they've got to be kind of public spokesmen fundraisers and that sort of stuff, you know.

PM: Yeah, and what will determine that move?

NIGEL: Just financial hardship; just a pure evil necessity, you've got to do it and you know Australia's donations and endowment type stuff is pretty small beer. (Nigel: lines 363-408)

His observation of tensions associated with the problematic struggle to deal with conflicting State and Commonwealth issues was illuminating. This conversation unveils the complex tensions and constraints Vice-Chancellors may be faced with in their attempts to sell-off assets as one fund-raising strategy.

The State, well there's a variety of things happening there, especially, well the first thing that's happening is in general across all jurisdictions there's a changing of corporations law and the requirements of corporations to report and the legal obligations that are coming through both Commonwealth and State Acts which are trying to get more transparency, more accountability, better prudential management as well. And universities are being caught up kind of inadvertently in that because they're, for all intents and purposes, they are entities that are operating in business environments.

So State treasuries are and Commonwealth treasuries think they should comply. So you get a thing in NSW like the Financial Arrangements Act which has come out of the NSW Treasury and the universities are caught by that. And the NSW or the West Australian one or the Victorian one, well Victoria's probably a little more limited than the others apparently. The Queensland ones are all moving in the direction where they're restricting the ways by which universities can invest. They're restricting the uses that universities can make of investment funds.

PETER: These are some of the things that Dawkins originally said were things the universities would have greater freedom and power.

NIGEL: Well the States are constrained. So for instance UNE has got some property which it would like to sell but it can only do so with the consent of the Lands Minister and the Education Minister. UQ's sitting on property around Bond which it would like to sell and convert to residential and other uses and the States saying you can only use it for educational purposes. So, you know, that's really interesting. That's one set of things.

The second is that in some cases there are changes to the statutes being made by the State Governments. There's some concern with the commercialisation moves that public assets are being exposed and there's ideological issues there, there's a question.

And then probably the most powerful one I think is the GST which is gonna shift revenue growth heavily to the States and my own view of where that will eventually go I don't think it's gonna go there readily but it will eventually go there is that the education functions and health functions will be regarded as State functions to be budgeted for by States primarily. And the constitutional power of the Commonwealth is benefits to students. So I think that the logic of the States getting more revenue through the GST, having more fiscal power if you like, the Commonwealth having to attend to defend the strategic demographic sorts of issues is going to mean that the Commonwealth role in education financing will be providing grants and loans to students. And the arrangements for funding of institutions or structuring of institutions will be functions of States. (Nigel: lines 452 – 464)

Nigel introduces an issue that promises to be a cause of significant problems for Vice-Chancellors in their capacity to work in an entrepreneurial environment with significant barriers applied to their range of fund raising opportunities. How universities deal with these impediments will be problematic. Nigel discussed some further implications that directly impact on the Vice-Chancellor as they represent serious constraints in their ability to deal with various internal and external stakeholders when dealing with fund raising opportunities.

It's this whole raft of financial law which is catching up but then the power of the State is also that it controls the statute that structures the institution, it appoints the governing board. Now if as universities become, you know they're hybrid organisations but as they become more commercially oriented, if Governments were alert to the needs for the composition of those boards to be competent right, rather than representational, then hopefully they'll change the rules for assignment of people to those Councils, and that's again a State

function not a Commonwealth function. And I mean [a University] has had real problems because of the nature of its Council. It's got X number of people from the State appointed on party lines and then you've got staff members and you've got convocation and all the rest of it. (Nigel: lines 536 – 566)

The role of Councils is discussed in more detail in the second case study chapter and in the conclusions. Nigel identifies a significant issue, however, that may lead to requirements for State and Commonwealth legislation in order to free up capacity for fund raising. He provides a sobering prediction, however, of the impacts of legislative changes on the University sector as a consequence of their capacity to raise revenue. This suggests that Vice-Chancellors are facing more difficult times ahead and implies further role-sending pressures will emerge to influence their role.

NIGEL: Rapidly shifting, I mean the post-96 shake-up's been quite profound and what I was trying to get to in that [city] paper was to say shit there's been a few mistakes made but that's how you learn and if we keep making the mistakes we've got a problem (laughs) but if what I think happening that last decade, people have actually sort of seen well hell you just can't run this commercial thing and just look at the revenue and think that's a surplus. You can't have, you know you've gotta actually have your eyes open, you've gotta have people who've got a bit of wit about them in terms of doing commercial deals. So that's now been learned they're professionalising that stuff pretty rapidly in most places so I'm pretty confident about the future actually. I think the viability of some institutions is another issue. Because they're not gonna be able to grow markets sufficiently, some institutions, so they're gonna have to merge or may be a couple will go out of business.

PETER: I'm not even game to ask you who they are.

NIGEL: Well some I think will go out of business, some will have to merge, some will become quite significant global partners. There's a prospect that some could you know if the States will allow them, a Monash could be headquartered anywhere in the world and could take equity from private investors. Urm and be the commercial operating global University, that's it's aspirations I think actually, I don't know whether the State Government will let that happen. So I mean then you talk about very different sorts of organisations. I think the problem at the moment is there's sort of, it's a hybrid, they're half managing a public good University with people still attaching a lot of kind of cash aid University thing and they're half managing businesses and they're managing them at a time when there's it's all you know in turmoil and transition. (Nigel: lines 554-556)

The above discussion highlights the dilemma facing Vice-Chancellors as they seek to expand their fund raising opportunities. There seems to be consensus that the entrepreneurial role of Vice-Chancellors is important but also a recognition that they are caught between two worlds and that neither side is providing the appropriate support for this role to work as effectively as it may well need. These issues were not overtly raised at University A. This may have reflected the somewhat conservative nature of the growth strategy there, and the more conservative nature of the Vice-Chancellor, a point he acknowledged in interview.

### **6.3.3 Public Relations and Community Support**

In establishing a position that may assist in financial and other support role, this Vice-Chancellor has worked vigorously to develop healthy relationships and support from the broad regional community around this University's location. Getting out and promoting the institution, and importantly, as an institution that serves this extended community, reflects a deliberate strategy to position the University in the eyes of potential students and future supporters of the institution. As the General Manager for Marketing and Development acknowledges:

There is a need also for the VC to interact with the broader community in terms of the political community, business community, and the community general (we were talking about internal relationships). Like any CEO they need to be up there leading the external face of the organisation, being the chief spokesperson. (Rob: lines 278 – 285)

The Vice-Chancellor's Executive Officer provided some insight into this role expectation. She believed this Vice-Chancellor had the characteristics to engage in these communities, an aspect of the role this University appeared to hold as important for its ongoing viability.

One thing that is important is 'representation out in the community'. One of the things that [VC] has been doing is (I have the map of the region) positioning ourselves to be the University of the region. [city] is a strange place, not really a city. If you tie it back to places like [lists 3 regional centres in this University's catchment area], which is where many of our students come from, the ability of the Vice Chancellor's (a modest approach) to go into these small places, like [city], meets the Mayor, talks away off the cuff, and is accepted. Nobody in these small towns get the feeling some person from the

University is talking down to them, but that someone say's is there anything you need us for, is there anything we can do?'

So the Vice-Chancellor is a spokesperson for the University, spokesperson for the sector, and spokesperson for the young people coming through. It is a very important part of the public image, it is a component. It helps if they are attractive - the attractiveness allied to the important public relations role - it is important to raise the profile of the University. [another Vice-Chancellor] was not a pretty man, but was one of the most brilliant persons I have worked for but also raised the profile of [his University] at a time when [his University] was charging in really hard. In Sydney... they were all four in the same position ...but the [Vice-Chancellor's] forceful personality and public relations nous/ability to work with all of the groups in [University] and the University made it the best University. There is no doubt about it. You have to have public relations nous. (Felicity: lines 311 – 333)

The Vice-Chancellor was cognisant of this role requirement and accepted that that was a critical part of his role. This was reinforced from many points of contact in this institution. Partly based on its size and history, this University was extremely pragmatic in its appreciation of where it was positioned and the implied strategic fragility of living close to very prestigious institutions. The Secretary to Council provides more insight to this aspect of the role.

No, well we have met across the drive. Council has not been off site much, we did have a retreat off site back in 1992. We went over to [hotel], but mostly the planning days Council has are on campus, but we step away from the Council room and go to another area, and use external facilitators to try to get the things out of it that we need. He uses the external retreats - one of the powerful things we have not talked about. The Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee has two retreats a year, he takes that committee into the region. Those meetings meet in the region, [lists 8 regional cities], and all those places. The whole of the region, the University attempts to go to the regions and when they meet with local dignitaries and leaders in the town and industry. We are building relationships with the region, trying to take the University to the community so that the community has a better understanding of what the University's role is. (Mark: lines 195 – 209)

Sally reinforced the perceptions of how important this role was. This is a general staff member, but one who seemed to appreciate a bigger picture for this University.

Being able to communicate that vision to the University and to get the University on side to work towards achieving that vision and to be

able to help set strategies and plans to achieve it. To be very active within the local and broader community, to make people in the community understand the importance of the University, try to increase the University's profile in the local and also the broader community. These are the bigger things I would expect of a VC. (Sally: lines 68 – 74)

Using contacts, being visible, pushing the University to the forefront of the public's perceptions, all seem to embody the role these individuals deem important. Further, the view is that this Vice-Chancellor has been particularly effective in playing out this role.

He's certainly, in some sense, the external face of the University, and has a lot of influence within the community. He knows how to play contacts and has the connections with a lot of fairly important people in the [capital city] situations, and things like that, which has been very valuable for the University as a whole. That type of external focus and dealing with the stakeholders, in the community, good connections in DETYA, and good connections with [an important minister]. (Chen: lines 94 – 107)

In summary, a series of prescribed roles have been discussed, each reflecting the things that constituents within the University hold as important in the role performance of the Vice-Chancellor. The evidence suggests there is a consistent line across the institution on these matters and through discussions a picture emerges of a Vice-Chancellor engaging in these activities. The discussion now turns to some of the actual processes that were investigated within the institution and the attempt here is to portray a picture of "how" the Vice-Chancellor enacts some of the prescribed roles discussed above as well as other perhaps less formalised roles that reflect complex internal management practice.

## **6.4 Internal Role-Enactment Processes**

The major area of access in the research involved observing and interviewing internal stakeholders of the institution. A number of critical themes have emerged from the data gathering and are discussed below.

### **6.4.1 Managing Internal Resource Tensions**

A number of themes that emerged from the research have a relationship to the issue of Vice-Chancellors managing internal constituents. How Vice-Chancellors deal

with competition for resources within the institutions is a cause for much interest. A number of interviewees with experience outside the University sector commented on the frustration of having to manage with so many competing agendas for scarce resources or information. As one interviewee Steve noted,

I thought that I might retire at one stage and I went to the University of xxx for a few years, but ambition got the better of me, and I ended up in xxx, you know, and not retired and working probably as hard as I've ever worked in my life. Anyone that says that universities are not pressure cookers is completely wrong, and I can say that from the wealth of my experience and background. I thought that I worked particularly hard when I was in a commercial environment. I find that I probably work just as hard, if not harder, here, and I find that I don't have the resources that I could call on in the commercial environment, because, in the commercial environment there is the commercial imperative, then you find the resources, you take them, whereas here, no matter what the imperative is, it's very hard to move things around to allow you to do, because there are always competing aims, and there is no one thing about universities, there is no one major aim. It is very hard to get one single corporate mission. There are always a number of them, and all at various times are seen by the constituency as to be as important as any other. (Steve: lines 24-40)

Key players in these tensions included the divisional heads (or Deans) and the administrative team charged with the resource allocation models such as Steve (above). Part of the management group (specifically the Executive Director Corporate Services and the Human Resources Director) had non-University experience in management, as did the Vice-Chancellor. The issue of universities acting for the individual disciplines over the good of the University as a whole is a recurring theme in academic management literature (Cohen & March, 1974). Cohen and March's classic analysis of chaos and ambiguity in universities illustrated the reality for many who have tried to take on leadership roles.

Political jockeying is one matter for Vice-Chancellors to manage. In times of fluctuating fortunes for discipline groups, managing areas that operate in financial deficits is another. Cross-subsidisation emerged as a particularly problematic issue. The following discussion with a senior academic highlighted the difficulties for this Vice-Chancellor.

I was just talking to someone today that was saying one of the Academic Divisions in xxx and xxx is going to be around one million

in the red next year, partly because they have not been able to attract a lot of students, or as many as they need to and not getting engaged in the entrepreneurial business, and not bringing in money. This will lead to the University taking some tough decisions about that part of the University. There are other parts, there has been an ongoing practice, in lets say the xxx area - one of the options there may have been to say that that part of the University is no longer viable. I certainly had a feeling about a year ago that [the VC] may have moved to shut that down but has actually done the reverse and is pumping a lot of money into it trying to sort out its problems. xxx is another area suffering as well, they are struggling with student numbers as well, and an area under threat and subsidised heavily by other parts of the University. (Chen: lines 208-217)

This staff member was not particularly bitter about the issue of subsidisation but acknowledged that it was creating difficulties for the institution as a whole. With changes to the distribution model for the Federal Government's Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) having been announced at the time of this research, implications for a shift in emphasis of direct funding towards more expensive disciplines such as medicine were having serious consequences for lower funded disciplines, particularly in the humanities. Chen went further in illustrating the complexity of the issue.

PETER: Balancing that type of environment would be tough on any CEO.

CHEN: Yes. [A School] is like that with a lot of senior staff but they are bringing in some good research grants. The two larger ARC grants the University got in the latest round were in the [School]. Those parts of the University are quite important from the point of view of the research status of the University and yet they probably need two to three times the students, as they have to be viable, but are just not getting them. It is very tough to decide what to do about that.

PETER: Yes - juggling some of the stakeholders.

CHEN: My area is one of the areas cross-subsidising that as well. It is tough for the VC as they do have an internal role as well. Juggling these sorts of things. (Chen: lines 218-237)

Chen was indicating a fairly prescriptive role-sending signal to the Vice-Chancellor here. When pressed to shed further light on these tensions, Chen indicated a perception of a change in decision making practice in this institution due to perceived pressure to maintain strong relations with the discipline groups.

PETER: Can you tell me more about that?

CHEN: That convincing parts of the University to keep doing these sorts of things in order to look after other parts is probably one of those roles [of the Vice-Chancellor – researcher’s note here]. I suspect that the way the University has worked in the past has been not sufficiently transparent, so there is a lot of misinformation, rumour, and innuendo. I thought it would have been useful to put it on the table and say “here are some of the cross subsidies that are occurring and the reasons why we need to do it” - actually have that more open. People feel more comfortable about that.

PETER: I wonder how many other senior people in the institution would agree with what you are say. I would think a few people would feel threatened with that? Particularly those in areas not gaining sufficient revenue.

CHEN: They probably feel threatened in the current environment, as there are a lot of rumours going around about them not pulling their weight. If you become a lot more public about the situation, and the rationale for it, it would ease those tensions. That is possibly one of the things I have learnt a lot about over the years - is that in the University environment where you don't have a lot of commercial in confidence type rationales for keeping things secret - the more you get things out in the open and transparent with the decision making processes, the more comfortable people feel.

There are a lot of contradictions in that sense - I think a lot of academia has been predicated on a collegial culture and has been slowly transformed into a managerialist culture over recent times. But the collegial culture in universities does not extend to resource allocation decisions. There are often two clear areas that are happening in University - the management of resources, and the decisions on the academic side of things. The academic things are done through a collegial process, and resource allocation is kept separate from that. (Chen: lines 241-275)

This discussion highlights the political sensitivity of resource allocation within the University system that, according to Chen, has evolved to a more opaque management process in relation to internal funding distribution. One strategy available to the Vice-Chancellor in relation to the above discussion was to enhance a School’s capacity to improve its income generation through appointing a more effective head. The researcher was privy to a short-listing process for a Head of a School (HOS) that had experienced financial and staff relations problems over a number of years. A restructure, a spill of positions and a subsequent need to fill a vacancy allowed the Vice-Chancellor to seek to re-invigorate the School through a

judicious new appointment. The Observation Diary notes for this meeting reflect the approach adopted by the Vice-Chancellor.

Short Listing Meeting. HR person; student representative, department staff representative, VC, cognate discipline rep, one other (unidentified).

VC continually referred to the University's values in this discussion.

The area had experienced serious problems in relation to its performance and staff relations.

VC set very clear picture of the values that were important for academic staff to follow at this University. They must be a professor of the University, they should not become isolated within their discipline, but must be open to the University community.

This was a leadership issue where the VC was selling the University - a case of role sending signals to this group and an expectation that this would be relevant to the selection process and decisions. (Observation Diary Note: 8/11/2000)

The Vice-Chancellor also discussed the need for the appointee to manage the School more effectively than previous occupants and that improved financial management was also a significant issue for this School to confront. The following extract from an early interview with the Vice-Chancellor illustrates his understanding of the importance of this issue.

VCa: Well it isn't managing. I don't manage the University...but.....what's acceptable and what's not acceptable is a way of arguing within the University. So the VCAC which you'll see tomorrow it is not acceptable to say "I don't like this because my Division will lose" This is not acceptable. You'll see some code for it.

PETER: You've established this. Is this some unwritten rule?

VCa: Yeah it's unwritten. Yes when I came it was just Robber Barons versus Robber Barons. You're not allowed to do that anymore. And Heads of Schools meetings which is the next level down with 17 Heads of schools, it's when I meet with them it's informal, actually, so's VCAC. VCAC is like the Australian Cabinet and in the constitution there's no formal existence. I'm the Chief Executive Officer and I can do what I like... But the constitution says, actually Council does what it likes. Council runs everything, but of course it doesn't. It gives it all to me and that's what the constitution of the University says and I set up a series of consultative groups that help me make those decisions and I try and get that tone

everywhere where it is not acceptable to say that something that is in the interests of the whole is not on because it affects me, and after xx years I think that's widely acceptable. I mean people still do it but usually by disguising it or by showing it as something else. I'm not saying we're a perfect place at all but that I think you will see this is a highly constructive group of people and when you're there you've, you are expected to behave as part of the senior corporate management group, you're worrying about the whole University. For example, we have a real worry about quality control at a distance and there's no criticism on my part of anyone about that. It is a problem and we have to deal with that. So everyone's brains are put together. So that's three. Setting the tone of the place. (VCa: lines 388-435)

In a follow-up interview with the Vice-Chancellor he was asked how he generally attempted to balance the potential conflict. His response suggests more goes on behind the scenes than up front but is still illuminating.

VCa: You need to establish first of all (a) that budgets are estimates, and they will not be an especially accurate forecast of the future, (b) that in a zero-sum system any over-run by one Division represents a loss to others, (c) that we all do our best, and are understanding. That will cope with any event in a single year. If there are many events, or a single area goes bad in successive years, you have to send in the accountants, usually with the full agreement of the one who is having trouble. The worst single event we ever had was a calamitous over-estimate of foreign student income from the area that had been most successful in attracting foreign students. Its Dean was strangely silent, but everyone else was sympathetic - it could have happened to them.

Basic rule: you have to have everyone in the same tent before you can do all this. (VCa second interview: lines 6-19)

Getting them in the "tent" may be the difficult bit for Vice-Chancellors, according to Cohen and March (1974), but, as will be shown in the subsequent discussion and the conclusions, is possible. In achieving some success in managing these internal issues, the Vice-Chancellor has a number of options available to him or her that may be effective. The following discussion examines the range of communication (role-sending and role-enactment) strategies utilised by this Vice-Chancellor

#### **6.4.2 Informal Meetings, Walk Arouns and Open Doors**

Marginson and Considine's (2000) observation that universities are increasingly moving towards centralised, less formal decision making structures is reflected to an extent in this case study institution. However, a number of these informal groups

don't follow Marginson and Considine's observations exactly. This Vice-Chancellor utilised a range of informal communication strategies to allow information to flow more freely among staff. The Executive Officer to the Vice-Chancellor, who had extensive experience in the higher education sector, both in universities and government departments, reflected on the informal meetings at this institution.

The Vice-Chancellor here has two other committees; one I service which breaks his rule of five. There is a Council rule of five for committees, committees can't be more than five. This breaks that because they are strictly advisory committees. One is the Student Advisory Committee and he has on that elected representatives from all of the divisions, all of the elected members of the Students Association, he has all the elected members of CUPA (postgrad. one), and anyone who shows an interest is invited. The agendas are **completely open**, [researcher's emphasis] the students are very open and have a sort of bricks and bouquet section where they tell him about so and so being a problem, so and so being fabulous, etc. (Felicity: lines 349-358)

This discussion opened up further reflection on the nature of some of the groups that the Vice-Chancellor had encouraged to form at this institution. Felicity operated very much in a support role to the Vice-Chancellor, both in policy writing but also in following up issues that arose in these meetings.

Another thing is to have the self confidence of knowing that even if a tricky thing comes up you can deal with it in a way that either postpones the decision until you have had the chance to talk through with other people but it is a feeling of self confidence in being able to deal with groups. Being able to deal with groups is important as you deal with a bunch of different groups. xxx [the VC] also has the Heads of Schools because we restructured into three Divisions and six faculties, a lot of the actual responsibility is now on HOS. Again, they are regular but informal meetings with all HOS, and they raise with him issues of concern which might be - the way in which sessional staff are paid - unnecessarily bureaucratic - it happens but we are fixing it. The HOS raise things and we take them up further and generally try to fix them. Those types of advisory groups take time out of a busy schedule but are invaluable, they are not safety valves but before safety valves. They are invaluable methods of finding out the first trickle before the steam builds up, and are also a valuable way at looking at the way in which Heads of Schools are managing. Which HOS is doing good, who is working proactively in a difficult situation and how they interact themselves. It is never just

what is on the agenda but also the actual process of the meeting as well, providing all types of information to the Vice Chancellor. (Felicity: lines 360-382)

This discussion is highlighting the perception that gaining an understanding of what is happening at the coalface is a critical issue for this Vice-Chancellor. Importantly, this comment highlights the opportunity for multi-directional role-sending signals – that is, the Vice-Chancellor has an opportunity to both send **and** receive signals from key stakeholders in the institution. This discussion supports a range of interview data gathered on this Vice-Chancellor’s propensity to work hard at keeping in touch with the internal members of the University community.

This Vice-Chancellor employed a range of informal meetings to engage with staff within the University. This researcher was privy to a number of these meetings during the course of the research. One to one briefings are common and can vary from high level political issues to a general discussion regarding upcoming events. One such event involved a one to one meeting with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor who was representing the University at a meeting in Sydney. The Vice-Chancellor was keen to provide some guidance on what was appropriate to discuss at this event.

Sit in on a one to one briefing with VC and Deputy VC. This is a “heads up” [Researcher term for raising awareness] for the DVC on a couple of critical matters. DVC will be representing [University] at meeting in Sydney and VC wanted to ensure DVC was on the same page on a couple of matters of issues. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor was initially unsure of my presence as an observer. No paperwork or agenda here. A low key discussion focussing on maintaining University’s position on a confidential item. It also allowed the Deputy Vice-Chancellor a chance to clarify the Vice-Chancellor’s perspective on what was appropriate to discuss in the meeting. (Observation Diary Note: 8/11/2000)

These meetings take the form of regular and quick episodes of communication and role-sending. They can occur as a diary item (pre-planned) or as a spur of the moment opportunity. This Vice-Chancellor was known to have a relatively consistent “open-door policy” and it was conceded that he was very much available for these kinds of meetings.

Other staff such as the Human Resources Director experienced this form of informality and openness in getting access to the Vice-Chancellor through less formal means.

...But my, I guess the intersection with the V-C is fairly regular. I would probably talk to him um two or three times a week directly and he would quite often maybe once a week drop in and talk about an issue. I think because we're small and I think because our V-C does want to be intimately involved in the small and the big matters. And a lot of those obviously involve people and therefore he likes to discuss people issues. I think he also makes it quite clear to the staff in general, that he is available, that he has a very open door policy. People probably tend, in my view, to go and see the V-C too early and too often. And I think the V-C allows it to happen, whether that's right or wrong, that's a matter for style. (Greg: lines 35-45)

This example highlights a number of issues. Are the people who go to the Vice-Chancellor engaging in role-sending behaviours? The Vice-Chancellor seems, according to Greg, to accept that. It may be that the Vice-Chancellor is keen to minimise communication gaps between staff and his office where possible. Greg was initially quite bemused when the Vice-Chancellor met him for the first time. In this case the Vice-Chancellor had arrived at Greg's office, unannounced, to introduce himself. As Greg notes above, this also reflects a certain "style" of operating that seemed to impress Greg.

Other members of staff also reported this propensity to engage in informal communication strategies. Sally, the Elected General Staff Member to Council provided the following examples of this Vice-Chancellor's style.

Definitely. xxx (the VC) has open door policies, he is a hands-on Vice Chancellor and knows most general staff, or all staff who have been around at least five years. He knows most by name and sometimes identifies special projects and will personally invite a specific member of the general staff to be involved in that project. You don't get the sense that there is a strong hierarchy, in that decisions are communicated down through a chain of command. They may come down a couple of levels, or sometimes direct from the Vice-Chancellor. It is not unusual for xxx to walk into my office if he wants something. He never phones to say "Sally can you come around and see me?" he is more likely to come to my office. I think that is important that a Vice-Chancellor does that, and has those people skill qualities, it is very important for the culture of the organisation. I would hate to be in a University where the Vice-

Chancellor did not walk around and talk to the staff. I don't think you would be fortunate to get someone quite as informal in those areas as xxx is. (Sally: lines 125-148)

The preceding discussion highlights a degree of informality but with one objective always in mind and that was to maintain a close relationship with staff and students and to enhance internal communication.

### **6.4.3 Symbolism and Role-Modeling**

Role-enactment can take many forms. While travelling by car with the Vice-Chancellor to an off-campus meeting, the researcher noticed the Vice-Chancellor wearing a name on a badge on his shirt. The name tag carried no titles, just the name of the Vice-Chancellor. The following is a reconstruction of this unrecorded conversation with the Vice-Chancellor that sought an explanation for the badge. The Vice-Chancellor has provided consent for this recounting of the conversation to be included in the thesis. It represents a core symbolic gesture on the part of the Vice-Chancellor.

The key message associated with this name badge, according to the Vice-Chancellor, was that anybody on campus could walk up to him and call him by his [first name]. They should not have to be hesitant about this and in showing this side to his style, people would be encouraged to be more open and approachable. The Vice-Chancellor then told a story about the importance of this form of openness to staff.

A new Professor had joined the institution and word had got back to the Vice-Chancellor that this particular appointment had a practice of insisting that junior staff refer to him as “Professor”. On becoming aware of this, the Vice-Chancellor had visited the professor wearing his name tag. In short, the Vice-Chancellor pointed out the purpose of the name badge and that he expected his professors to be professors of the University, and not just of their disciplines. Further, if anybody could refer to the Vice-Chancellor by his first name then it would be inappropriate for professors to place themselves above that. If this example was just an isolated incident then these insights would bear little significance. However, this Vice-Chancellor adopted a range of strategies to impart the messages consistent with

those discussed above. For example, these views and values receive attention in the Vice-Chancellor's weekly internal University newspaper.

Over the past few years I have observed on several occasions how the University is a stage on which is played out, in all kinds of ways, the competing demands of the individual and the group...

So it seems to me that the new ethic of higher education is one which has to emphasise the TEAM (a nice acronym for "Treat Everyone As Myself!") rather than the individual. (VCa: Weekly Newspaper Column August 1999<sup>2</sup>)

The Vice-Chancellor utilises this weekly forum to pass on information to the University on a range of matters and requests feedback from staff about these as well. A more detailed discussion of various forms of communication strategies is discussed below. However, this Vice-Chancellor seemed to be conscious of the importance of being consistent in signalling to the University what constituted acceptable forms of behaviour in his institution.

#### **6.4.4 Industrial Relations**

Perhaps this is an area that is taking up ever more time for Vice-Chancellors. Not all are actively involved but many are and this Vice-Chancellor was probably taking the lead at the time of this research. A long-term administrative staff member in the sector made the following comments concerning Vice-Chancellors and their capacity to deal with industrial relations (IR).

I think another significant thing which goes with the relationship is the stake-holders, the industrial relations scene - how that changed. In the 70s there was a social worker's court case (I think in 1978 but can't be sure of the date) which meant that you could have an industrial dispute going beyond one state. Immediately that happened the staff associations, FAUSA, filed a log of claims on all universities and in time that translated over to academic staff as well. That is an area where Vice-Chancellors were absolutely floundering, they did not know how to handle this sort of - calling in legal advice. The whole relationship with universities was quite pathetic to see how they were performing - to be quite honest. They actually set up their own organisation, an employee group, but nobody knew, they weren't trained to do it. (Neil: lines 76-100)

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<sup>2</sup> For reasons of confidentiality the full reference for these articles is not revealed here but can be obtained from the researcher on request.

Trained or not, this Vice-Chancellor had taken an active role in the University's industrial processes, albeit in a constructive manner according to a number of interviewees, including the HR Director.

I mean for example, I guess the biggest exercise that we've done, or the one that has, maybe this is a bit of HR, can have the biggest impact, is the enterprise agreement. At other institutions the V-C would want to see every word that is written, every possible dollar that was going to be distributed one way or another, whereas the V-C has allowed, and if you also look at the composition of bargaining teams at other institutions, they will normally have a Deputy V-C or Pro V-C, Deans, or what. A rather wide range and high powered structures. We've done a single enterprise agreement covering all staff, totally comprehensive, so nothing else protrudes into the enterprise agreement, and the bargaining team has been myself and the Manager of ER. And he has given us a free rein to do that. Obviously we consult with him regularly. We would talk to him about the big issues, but we have done some innovative things that he's just allowed us to do. I guess there's a level of trust that has built up over a number of years. But certainly if we were looking at one of the NTEU clauses, I forget what they call it, but every agreement has it in there, um.. job security. The job security clause, and I mean there was, and that was one which I probably had to consult with him more often, and at the end of the day, I needed to get him to give the wording. But the NTEU's position was, that you had to have a job security clause, the lowest common clause, or lowest clause which they'd accept, if you had major organisational change, Council had to sign off on it before you could do it. I think it was the University of [University name] model. [VC] made it quite clear in discussions with [NTEU representative], and I had further discussions with [NTEU Secretary], I think it's [NTEU Secretary], the Assistant Secretary or whatever. That no, he's the decision maker of this institution on a day to day basis, and he would be putting, and while he may consult with his Council, the decision is his. He's very adamant about what his powers are. (Greg: lines 76-112)

Greg is indicating two issues here – the Vice-Chancellor's trust in staff and the Vice-Chancellor's recognition that he has ultimate sign-off on the agreement. But, this example provides a more interesting insight into the role of the Vice-Chancellor in the bargaining process. Here is an excerpt from Chen, who was at that time an academic staff representative on the bargaining team, discussing the last enterprise bargaining process and how it worked out with the Vice-Chancellor.

PETER: Whom did you do it with?

CHEN: A lot of it was with the HR Manager and [Manager Industrial Relations] was involved for a fair period of the process but he was off on leave during some of the critical times. There was probably one key meeting we had with [VC] and [Executive Director Corporate Services] and a couple of other players to settle a lot of the key issues. Where the meat of it actually happened.

PETER: So that, the major bits, happened in a fairly limited timeframe.

CHEN: Yes. We had been negotiating at a low-key level for most of last year but started getting to a reasonable intensity this year. We sorted out a lot of clause related matters. We developed what is called 'a comprehensive agreement' this time around that covered most of the award conditions and replaces essential the awards.

PETER: How much was [VC] involved in the process?

CHEN: He was certainly controlling things from the background, eg. [HR Director] would not do anything of any significance without at least checking it with [VC] and [Executive Director Corporate Services]. He had a key role in it as well. But when it came to the actual crunch and real key issues that were sticking points we had that meeting - it was [VC], [HR Director], [Executive Director Corporate Services] and [Manager Industrial Relations] on their side and [Union representative] and myself on the Unions side with another industrial officer as well. At that meeting things like salary, [VC] would talk and put the essentials on the table, and you could tell from the body language and facial expressions that [Executive Director Corporate Services] was unaware that [VC] was going to do that. [VC] knew that that was their bottom line, and knew that he would not settle without going to that sort of level and made the offer at that time. He decided it was worth settling it.

PETER: [Executive Director Corporate Services] nose would have been out of joint for a bit?

CHEN: Possibly, but I think he is realistic, and that [VC] made the right sorts of decisions. It was interesting being at that meeting, we walked away knowing that we had all but settled the EB at that point. There was still more work to go on little issues. And getting National agreement on that as well.

[VC] was very keen to settle without industrial action. He saw that as potentially damaging to the University. He did see a path through and realised that in the end they would probably have to settle for, what we settled, and was not worth having a fight over it.

PETER: Why have a battle?

CHEN: Yes, he was realistic enough to know that. We were concerned that the members might not back up with strong action, but we had a couple of members' meetings where they were very fiery and management had their spies in there so we would do things to stir the members up a little. Some members actually took that to heart and really got going, and keen on their own agenda, and sent a clear message back to Management that the members were not going to take it lying down. Potentially, there was an over estimation of the likelihood of the members taking action which frightened them a bit. It was interesting that the members came on board with what we were trying to do, which helped the negotiations tremendously, and it was quite indicative of the need to bring members into that type of process. (Chen: lines 6-86)

The above extract highlights the Vice-Chancellor's concern to settle the agreement relatively quickly and with as little pain as possible. The observation by Chen that the Vice-Chancellor was hesitant to get involved in any ugly industrial dispute is consistent with the other examples of this Vice-Chancellor's particular management style at this University. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed the details of putting the generous salary offer on the table to this researcher while we were on route to a meeting at the University, and agreed that he had done it to avoid unnecessary industrial pain to the University. A critical question in relation to this example arises when attempting to unpack the role-sending messages underlying the Vice-Chancellor's decision to table the salary offer without apparent consultation. What determined the Vice-Chancellor's action? Was it a consequence of the Vice-Chancellor imposing his own values onto the process, thus sending a signal of his respect or trust of the academic staff? Or was it more informed by his perceptions of negative role-sending messages emerging from the academic staff if the process became too protracted? On the balance of the data from this case study it is probably both but likely to be more the former than the latter, based on the Vice-Chancellor's continuous expression of valuing staff.

#### **6.4.5 Council Relations**

This University had a relatively benign Council compared to a number of nationally documented clashes at other universities. The relatively small size of the University (Council membership of 24 as at end of 2000) seems to have influenced the role of Council. The Vice-Chancellor's reputation, as indicated previously, seemed to

facilitate a relatively cooperative relationship with the Council. General business was open to the local media and evidenced by observation of the December 2000 Council meeting, the Chancellor chaired with a relatively non-confrontational style.

Observed Council. Relatively mild state of affairs. VC and Chancellor work well together and clearly have an excellent relationship. VC continually reinforces [University's] values – “we’re aiming to be the best professional teachers of professionals – that’s what we do best and will continue to do”. Some discussion on political stonewalling by [another University] of proposed [confidential] school. Local journalist attends Council and is clearly at home there. Good relationship between [VC] and the journalist – lots of repartee between these two. External relationship building? Public relations exercise for University. (Observation Diary Note: 6/12/2000)

Part of the reason for the light mood of the meeting may be due to the partnership between the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor. This relationship seems to be based on mutual respect and shared values towards the institution.

SUE: So graduation has been important and I think as I have become more accustomed to it, [VC] and I have found there are lots of things we can interchange which is good; representative things. We have been able to find the balance between us, so things that traditionally he once did, I do now. An example may be to do a talk, attend a lunch, a passing out parade of one of the small groups that contract our services.

PETER: I can see some institutions where some Chancellors or VCs could become quite defensive about giving up their roles.

SUE: Yes. But there has been quite a bit of flexibility between us. And before we do meetings we always spend an hour or two going through things and work out which ones I can deal with, or which ones he can deal with. How a meeting is run is very important, I think I run a very good meeting. [Unidentified name] tells me I am very directive - and I say "that's fine" as I want to get through the business. Most of the work is done outside the meeting anyway. But [VC] and I work out who handles things if there is an issue that is unexpected, which are the meetings you think have nothing in them. They turn out to be the ones that there is some little sleeper. We have had big drama in the time that I have been Chancellor - which was when I was not here (which was interesting) [voice went low, could not pick up on tape]. So somewhere in there, it is not because I am particularly [UNCLEAR] but because there is better flexibility and better movement between the two of us. And I think I know what I don't know. (Sue: lines 118-140)

Two issues emerge here: Firstly, that the two seem to be comfortable sharing roles to be more flexible and secondly, that it confirms most of the really hard work is done prior to the meetings. But this Chancellor sees her role as taking on a more interesting responsibility of being mentor to the Vice-Chancellor. The following recounts an example of the Chancellor taking a much more active role in trying to get the Vice-Chancellor to take some action over a long running problem with one of the Schools in the University. Some of this detail is deliberately obscured due to confidentiality issues but the general thrust of the Chancellor's story reflects, even in a "open and trusting relationship" (Chancellor's words) there will be times when the Chancellor may choose to intervene in the internal matters of the institution.

PETER: Firstly can you give me a bit of an idea how you see the job, from within the University, "his role", during your time as Councillor and Deputy Chancellor.

SUE: When I arrived here I would have seen [VC] as definitely a leader of the University. What I have tried to massage in to him a bit more in, during the last year or two, is to be a manager or to be equally a manager. Because he has a very trusting way of delegating and a big respect for collegiality, (I don't have quite the respect for collegiality that he has), and I can see things where he makes assumptions that people understand what he is leading them about, and they actually want more detail. I have counselled him about that. We have a couple of issues on the plate now - one to do with our [University] School. I said to him, about a year ago, "I cannot be the Chancellor of a University where I am in receipt of information that says the people who are being paid and acting appallingly, and you are doing nothing about it. You have given them 10 years to sort themselves out, they have had three enquiries, I want it sorted out, or I just can't stay". There is certainly someone being treated in the most vile fashion and if she is mad, we will let her know if they sent her mad, or whether she was mad when they started her. But whatever it is - it is appalling, secondly, yes they are a bunch of dickheads, (laughter) most have not got high skill, so they need to be happy not abused. Effectively they are on a public payroll, fighting amongst themselves, zero output, poor teaching - how can we tolerate it. So I told [VC] I wanted him to do it.

Well I have to say he did it. Spilled all the positions. We put in an enquiry team of my choice [name of consultant], a very high powered, we got the human lawyer in, the [external but discipline skilled group] people in (people I work with and respect) who all agreed that it was an absolute catastrophic mess, and they recommended to [VC]. He said "nobody agreed that they would take their advice".

I did not talk these people up beforehand, but I asked them if they would do it if [VC] invited them. They were commended and all the positions were spilled- he did that. That is something he probably should have done two-three years ago. (Sue: lines 118-170)

This was a long-running and extremely difficult issue at this University because the School in question had taken up considerable amounts of time and energy and the Chancellor's ultimatum eventually acted as a catalyst for a change in approach to dealing with the problem. This clearly reflects a more hands-on approach from the Chancellor, but this did not seem to have a negative impact on the relationship as she reported later in the interview. The Vice-Chancellor had acknowledged that he had known and respected the Chancellor since childhood, obviously therefore influencing to a degree the trust in the relationship.

#### **6.4.6 Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (VCAC)**

This group was regarded as the senior decision making committee in the University and comprised all senior executive including Pro Vice-Chancellors, Executive Officer to the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Directors. In interview, with staff, it became apparent that this Committee ran on very loose agendas and had a degree of informality to it. But this group is perceived as the key decision making group.

So there has been that move away from collegial decision making to more decisions made through VCAC, well I think there would be very few decisions that are made without some form of consultation, it would be very rare not to consult the academic staff in any major decision that concerns them. People never think they have been consulted enough. (Sally: lines 162-168)

Where the Vice-Chancellor sees this Committee as a consultative group there are signs that it is not as harmonious a group as the Vice-Chancellor might have liked. One member was quite dismissive of this Committee.

You are in a club of VCAC which - the egos are so big they bounce around the wall.

They are not going to tell you if you're off track because they would like to see you fall over. (Rob: lines 338-340)

The researcher sat in on a VCAC meeting and the observation notes support this somewhat cynical view. It was surprising, given the weight of interview data about the inclusiveness of the Vice-Chancellor, that certain members of VCAC were clearly not completely engaged during this meeting. This is illustrated in the observation notes below.

Observed VCAC (Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee). Attended by Pro VC's, Chair of Academic Board, Executive Officer to VC, Directors, (Deputy VC not there)

VC extremely collegial- very inclusive

Tended to defer to Executive Director Corporate Services as many issues involved budget

Very non-directive – although uses charm and excellent communication skills to help reach agreement (referent and legitimate power here).

Clearly evidence of emotional intelligence at work. Encouraging debate and contribution.

Some evidence here that not all members happy. One senior staff member rolling eyes and showing non-verbal dissent. This was towards the Executive Director Corporate (there could be either an ideological or power issue here).

The Exec Dir had a lot of power in the room, including expert and information power and probably a large degree of connection power to VC.

The Exec Director made limited eye contact to some members but tended to remain in the view of the VC

One member sat back and only contributed when directly asked. (Observation Diary Note: 7/11/2000)

Perhaps this may have arisen out of resentment that VCAC had taken much of the decision making away from the Academic Board as one VCAC member speculated. But it may have been more subtle than that. The Executive Director Corporate Services for the University appeared to have a great deal of influence in this meeting as the Vice-Chancellor frequently demurred to him for advice. This tended to have the effect of putting the spotlight on this person, a result that was not approved of by some members.

These notes undersell the obvious displeasure that two members of this group held for the Executive Director. Their body language was evidenced by episodes of actually turning away from the table and some slouching in their seats. It was not clear from the observer's position whether the Vice-Chancellor was aware of these behaviours. This raises questions about the perceptions of the increasing power of non-academic roles in the University, such as the Executive Director's. This person was, by far, the most active participant in this group and seemed to wield a high degree of power based on his understanding of the way the University operated from a management and systems perspective.

#### **6.4.7 Decision Making**

Previous chapters have discussed trends in university management that have moved to a more centralised model of decision making. Access to extremely sensitive matters was not given for either case study apart from some important exceptions. Vice-Chancellor A adopted a more collegial approach based on corridor conversations with senior staff. VCa acknowledged his strategy of including the academic and general staff unions in enterprise bargaining discussions in an open and inclusive way. The Executive Director Corporate Services acknowledges, however, that the Vice-Chancellor has the ultimate say at the end of the day, regardless of the level of consultation.

So there are tensions in this area and our role to make sure that whatever we do to try and ameliorate that and to provide advice. Now you don't, the Vice-Chancellor never has to take any advice but there is no doubt in my mind the VC runs this university, always will. But I see my role as to give advice, that as much as possible it is free of personal bias. So the VC can actually make a decision and say well, thanks for that, I wanted to go down this path, and I say, fine, then we will do xyz if it comes unstuck. If we get away with it, great! We are not always right and the Vice-Chancellor's not always right. You just have got to do just what you can. (Steve: lines 241-251)

Greg the Director of Human Resources also highlights the decision making style of this Vice-Chancellor's blend of consultation and a recognition that the final say will rest with the Vice-Chancellor:

And he has given us a free rein to do that. Obviously we consult with him regularly. We would talk to him about the big issues, but we have

done some innovative things that he's just allowed us to do. And hasn't been... I guess there's a level of trust that has built up over a number of years. But certainly if we were looking at one of the NTEU clauses, I forget what they call it, but every agreement has it in there, um.. job security.

The job security clause, and I mean there was, and that was one which I probably had to consult with him more often, and at the end of the day, I needed to get him to give the wording. But the NTEU's position was, that you had to have a job security clause, the lowest common clause, or lowest clause which they'd accept, if you had major organisational change,

Council had to sign off on it before you could do it. I think it was the University of xxx model. (vcA) made it quite clear in discussions with xxx, and I had further discussions with xxx, I think it's xxx, the Assistant Secretary or whatever. That no, he's the decision maker of this institution on a day to day basis, and he would be putting, and while he may consult with his Council, the decision is his. He's very adamant about what his powers are (Greg: lines 94-111)

The key element of the discussions with various staff and observing VCa in action was that decision making was based on a relatively pervasive sense of trust within the organisation. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

## **6.5 Boundary Spanning Role-Enactment Processes**

At the edges of role performance, there exists a range of activities and contexts that share a multi-dimensional purpose in communicating to internal and external stakeholders. These take the form of various semi-formal roles such as entertaining at the Vice-Chancellor's residence, the use of various forms of media, and the activities associated with external representation roles (chairing external boards, for example) that Vice-Chancellors engage in.

### **6.5.1 Social Events and the Vice-Chancellor**

Vice-Chancellors become involved in myriad social gatherings in their capacity as institutional leaders. Aitkin has written about the rather prosaic experience of having to attend so many "chicken dinners" on an annual basis (Aitkin, 1997). This Vice-Chancellor accepted this was part of the role and was a frequent host (with his partner) at the Vice-Chancellor's residence. Considerable planning goes into these

events as they are perceived to serve an important role in connecting the University to its external communities.

This week we have had all manner of jobs done. The beauty of this room is we will clear this out, we will push on Sunday, it does not normally look this way it is set up for a reception as we had a dinner last week. We had it back to normal which is a seating area here and a dining table down there and we will go back to that when the receptions are finished. But for a buffet - he is expecting 50-60 to lunch on Tuesday, and we have 37 coming Sunday night, so for buffet meals - we will actually move these couches out into the other side of the room. If it is a nice night we will be able to have drinks outside and we have round tables that go up and down, very nicely made, designed by the [staff] at the University. We keep a couple up here and the rest are down there and bring them up when we have big functions. So we clear the room and set four round tables up and use a buffet table. When they come Tuesday for lunch we will add an extra table in, and because they are in a hurry, will pull that table out and have the line going around twice. So we would do that - well this year we have had two dinners for 50, a Council dinner where they did an outreach dinner into the business community and the 50 founders dinner, celebrating the founding of the University, part of the 30 year celebrations, and we have the AVCC Sunday night and then the lunch. We have an end of the year Council dinner, we have that every year for dinner after the last Council meeting. Their spouses are invited and will run to somewhere around 20 - 30, and a Lifelong Learning dinner which is about the same size. So I will probably make a decision - no after these two dinners we will put it all back again because there is a dinner for 12 happening in a month. So I am good at moving and is one of the reasons I like to have a bit of control over what is happening here as it is my furniture that we are moving around, so I don't mind doing that. We could have had it furnished except the budget ran out - but in fact we wanted it to be our house and it is not your house unless you can put your own furniture and hang your own things up, and they don't mind us putting nails in the wall. (Ann – VC's partner: lines 315-348)

This lengthy quote reveals much about the busy social and entertaining calendar the Vice-Chancellor engages in. This researcher observed a cocktail party for 35 for a largely external guest list at the Vice-Chancellor's residence and noted how both the Vice-Chancellor and his partner appear to be "at work" here.

Semi-formal.

Both VC and partner work room constantly and seem to sense a shared responsibility. Members of various groups in attendance both from inside the University and outside.

VC travels round room at least twice to mingle with everyone. 35 people for drinks. Over 1000 people through house by Nov 2000.

This process is actually a shared performance by VC and partner.

I get idea to interview the partner of the VC.

VC is only University representative at this function – he handles all the meet and greet with partner only. No senior staff back-up

Fully catered function.

VC then wraps up as he has function in city tonight between 6:30pm and 8:00pm. Critical he attends as it helps keep University name in public eye according to comment from VC. (Observation Diary Note: 6/11/2000)

The above notes highlight the effort required to sell the University (and the Vice-Chancellor) through this continual engagement with everyone in the room. In a comment to this researcher prior to this event, the Vice-Chancellor specifically signalled to me that I should watch him “work the room”. As the data indicates, this is not an inconsiderable effort as it is such a regular role. This kind of interaction clearly offers the opportunity for complex interplays of information flow. For example, Observation notes from this event record a range of topics.

Potential networking, gossip exchange, selling the University, and getting feedback on how the University is performing are all discussed in an open and non-threatening environment. (Observation Diary Note: 6/11/2000)

In a follow-up interview with Vice-Chancellor A in April 2006, he confirmed the detail discussed in the observation notes above as being among the reasons and outcomes for these functions.

### **6.5.2 Media and Speeches**

Increasingly, Vice-Chancellors are adopting wider ranges of communication strategies to both send and receive role-enactment signals. This Vice-Chancellor writes a weekly column for the internal University newspaper, presents two annual public addresses to staff, and is a regular commentator in the local and national media on higher education. This Vice-Chancellor has established a good relationship with the local media and one member of the press regularly attends the

open sessions of the University Council meetings. This is supported by interview data from a number of University members.

In the first instance, [VC] is ... a worldly person and likes to be in the community. [VC] is very community orientated, and conscious of how the media works, he has wide contacts outside the University sector, as well as wide contacts outside this University and is very canny in how he collects and collates this information and puts it together and provides input and seeks input from his senior staff. (Mark: lines 66-83)

Mark goes on to reinforce this Vice-Chancellor's commitment to utilising the media,

He makes good use of the [University newspaper], he speaks to the staff once or twice a year in the [the University public forum]. [the VC] is extremely good with the media and is always on the radio or television talking about issues. We are not talking about the day to day issues, and as he is a public academic he talks about the big issues. Not just the issues of this University but issues of the sector and nation. (Mark: lines 169-189)

The Vice-Chancellor supports these comments with some sense of pride. There is no doubt that competition for public recognition and acceptance of this University, which has tended to sit in the shadow of an illustrious institution nearby, are very important with this Vice-Chancellor.

We do extraordinarily well in media terms, in today's papers cover pieces. They're never negative about the University. If the University is mentioned, somebody's done something great at the University .... I have to advertise. (VCa: lines 274-283)

The media allows the Vice-Chancellor to send out a range of signals for both internal and external stakeholders to the University. In the calendar year 2000, the range of articles the Vice-Chancellor contributed to the University newspaper included: an article on the amicable conclusion to the University's Enterprise Bargaining (EB) arrangements (a process the Vice-Chancellor took some considerable part in); a commentary on the effectiveness of the AVCC in its role as trustee for the University system; a number of obituaries of significant people to the University; the value of travel to allow his perspective of the University to be viewed from outside; an argument for greater valuing of universities by the wider community; comments on the implications of the GST for universities; the importance of gender balance in universities; a salient reminder to the University

that the new funding environment will require a need to look at how the University operates and what it should be doing; a plea for Aboriginal reconciliation; and a reminder of the value of a balanced life for all. This latter was illustrated in the following statement “You can see the life in common in the way we go about doing things, the concern for good outcomes, the relative lack of ego, the supporting quality of the communications, and the way people thank one another” (VCa: Weekly Newspaper Column February 2000<sup>3</sup>). Thus this use of media allows the Vice-Chancellor to present a human face to the role, to provide insights to the University system that many may not necessarily have access to and it can convey an identity shaping role of reinforcing the cultural values of the institution.

Not all Vice-Chancellors may be as competent or desirous of utilising the media to help act out their role. A former Vice-Chancellor stressed a very strong view of the importance of learning to use the media to support the Vice-Chancellor.

PETER: What were the skills that you identified that you needed to bone up on?

KEN: Well, I did some courses in media work and how you sort of ... I did a course in Canberra with Prue Goward, she taught me. I did quite a few of them actually. I mean they grill you, you learn radio technique and TV technique.

PETER: Was this of your own initiative Ken, or was this...

KEN: Some of it was. In fact I got all my senior staff to do it. We did that in [city name] and you learn how if you want to get a message, you have only got thirty seconds to do it. What you're saying, how you respond to that. You get someone to really beat you up, Prue was good at that. The AVCC organised that one. Interesting only three Vice-Chancellors elected to do it and ...

Some of the others might have felt that they were skilled in that, but it is something you have to handle quite a lot and if you are not good at it you avoid the press and I think you avoid the press at your peril in this job and one of the first things I do now is try to get to know the press and never say no to talking to them and make sure I know what I am talking about. And develop a trust there too, I mean it is important that you don't tell them any lies and then they are confident with what you say. So that was something I hadn't done and I knew I had to get better at so I worked at it. I still don't regard myself as very

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<sup>3</sup> For reasons of confidentiality the full reference for these articles is not revealed here but can be obtained from the researcher on request.

good, but I am better at that than I was. I think that public speaking skills are something that is a bit hard to build on, I wished I was better at that and Vice-Chancellors have to do a fair bit of that, so that is something I have tried to work on. I haven't had any form of training and do it but get feedback, ask people to sit in. I did that particularly with my media relations person. I did the same with [staff member] here when he arrived. I say OK I will be occasionally talking to the press, either television or radio, you write something for public speaking and tell me later if the point I was trying to make was not made clear or if I said something stupid or wrong, tell me. People are very reluctant to actually do that to you, because they think you will be offended, but it is actually a bigger offence to detect an error and not tell me.

So I found that very helpful in terms of developing some better skills in the public presentation, of which you have to do a lot of as CEO. I don't know, I haven't talked much with VC's about that. I suspect they all vary a bit. Some of them are naturally very good and some of them are actually pretty awful. There is a big variation but I think it is an essential part of the job. (Ken: lines 279-326)

The other form of public media activity Vice-Chancellor A utilised was his public addresses to the University community. They were held at mid and year end and provided an opportunity for a two way communication process to occur. Questions were welcomed from the audience. Topics in these addresses often carry the same content as the internal newspaper articles but may have more specific detail such as discussion on the University's financial situation, or to allow the public acknowledgement of successes and achievements from across the University's staff and student groups. They also allowed the Vice-Chancellor to reinforce the values of the institution, a recurring theme with this individual as demonstrated by this excerpt from an annual public address to staff:

The imagined outcome was not unlike the campus of the University of xxx today, where eating, drinking, shopping, banking, posting, and the rest are in the centre, close to the Library and the lecture theatres. It is hard to go from one point to another without bumping into someone from another part of the University. From these casual contacts come the breaking down of 'silo' mentalities and tribal loyalties, to the benefit of us all. There are other contributing elements...our concentration on wide rather than narrow representation when committees are formed, my own preference for

occasions like these rather than sending memoranda out, and so on. (VCa: Address to Staff 25 July 2001<sup>4</sup>)

## 6.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced a range of situations and contexts that Vice-Chancellor A operated within. They suggest a complex milieu of roles, tasks, and relationship management issues. Underpinning all appears to be a set of common characteristics. The Vice-Chancellor's values of inclusiveness and openness seem critical to the operational style of this institution. There is extensive supporting evidence that staff do acknowledge this aspect of the Vice-Chancellor's role enactment. There is some evidence, however, that not everybody agrees this is the only way to manage and lead the institution. There may be a trade-off in terms of decisiveness in dealing with some problem areas. Nevertheless, Vice-Chancellor A's belief that communication is absolutely essential to the role is demonstrated in a range of strategies that seek to both inform and receive information important to the running of the institution. As has been illustrated, a great deal of the processes discussed and observed are dependent on the understanding of the Vice-Chancellor that various communication strategies are imperative to the operation of the University. The importance of informal communication strategies and contexts cannot be overstated. These appear to have a significant role to play in the Vice-Chancellor's raft of role behaviours.

Access to many of these informal processes has been of considerable benefit to this research, a point fleshed out in the conclusions chapter of this thesis. Important inter-relationships between prescribed roles and enacted roles were in evidence throughout the discussion in this chapter. The data suggest a relatively close alignment between prescribed roles and the actual roles performed by the Vice-Chancellor. This does not necessarily tell a tale of chaotic activity but rather a picture of busy and often demanding role requirements emerge.

Managing the emerging issue of resource allocation in a problematic environment underpins much of the internal role enactment of this Vice-Chancellor. Spending

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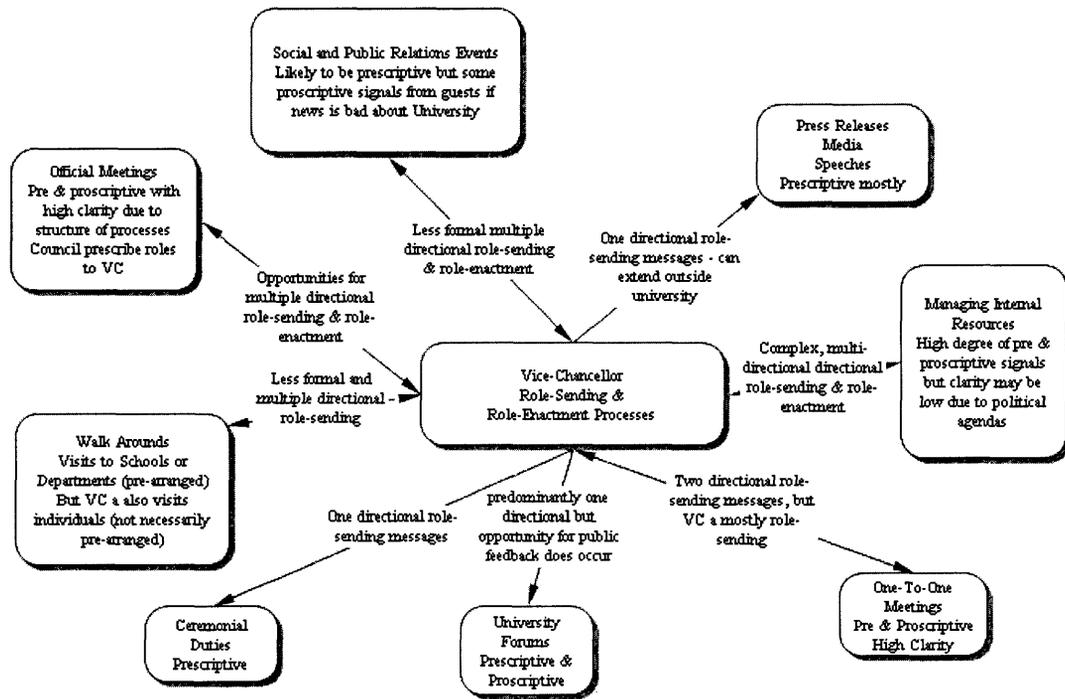
<sup>4</sup> For reasons of confidentiality the full reference for these articles is not revealed here but can be obtained from the researcher on request.

considerable time and energy in developing a shared culture that demonstrates mutual respect is an extremely difficult task. This Vice-Chancellor believed that this was an imperative in order to get staff to look at the University as a whole rather than a collection of independent parts. This represents a significant challenge even for a relatively small University.

Interviews from a range of stakeholders indicate this Vice-Chancellor's efforts to instil a clear vision and a supportive culture have placed this University in a reasonable position. Financially, the institution operates consistently in surplus and this was partly due to a considered and not over-extended strategic vision. This is not a University that seeks to fool itself into seeking unrealistic strategic outcomes. The interview evidence suggests this is partly due to the capacity of the Vice-Chancellor to read the higher education landscape accurately.

Building regional community support, competing in the higher education market on its terms, and providing a high quality educational experience, underpin this University's operational objectives. Strong support for staff, a clear identification that the internal academic community are valued also emerges from the data. Figure 6.3 below seeks to capture the interplay of role-sending and role-enactment processes at this University.

Figure 6.3 illustrates the multi-directional role-sending signals that occupy the typical day of a Vice-Chancellor. As this model illustrates different contexts generate different forms of role-sending and role-enactment episodes.



**Figure: 6.3 Role-Sending Signals – Vice-Chancellor University A**

Finally, it was a point of interest to examine and discrepancies between what the Vice-Chancellor said he did and what was observed in his actual role performances. In the contexts observed by this researcher, the stated and observed behaviours generally squared up. However, the Chancellor did indicate that the Vice-Chancellor needed more encouragement to deal with the very difficult staff related matters at times and that her experiences and pushing him to act more decisively with some matters on staff performance had been an issue.

Discussion now turns to Case Study University B.