

# THE CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP: BUSINESS SCHOOL DEANS, PROFESSIONAL MANAGERS, AND THE WIDER UNIVERSITY

## Background

Professional managers in business schools occupy a unique position in relation to their School, the school Dean, the wider university and other senior stakeholders. Part of the work of the Professional Managers' Committee of the Chartered ABS is supporting the development and performance enhancement of professional managers in business schools to drive performance of business schools via the addition of genuine value.

It is important that the unique nature of these roles is clearly articulated such that the interconnectivity of role expectations and training/development requirements can be elucidated. Clarity over the nature of the role creates improved targeting of training and development activities to enhance performance. The [Professional Managers' Training and Development Matrix](#) is the mechanism by which professional managers can link the nature of their role to a framework of training areas that is tailor-made for the business school context.

Through consultation with a range of business school heads of services and Deans, some common themes have emerged along with shared expectations of the role of the professional manager, regardless of variations in the specifics of job descriptions or reporting lines. The development matrix offers heads of professional services in business schools a tool to ensure that all managers in the school are directed to appropriate additional training to deliver effective support for academic leaders, and to simultaneously perform a degree of succession planning. However the focus of this advice is on the most senior member of professional services in the school, and her or his relationship with their Dean.

## The role of the professional manager in business schools

The role holder is:

- A good general manager, able to effectively manage across a broad range of more specialist and technical areas – expert manager rather than expert specialist – and is viewed as a source of expertise;
- A political operator, comfortable in a political arena and able to navigate effectively to achieve aims for the School, even while reporting lines may be into central services;
- A pragmatist able to apply realism to what can and can't be achieved or delivered to high standards in a resource constrained environment;
- A relationship manager, not just a relationship builder - capable of maintaining relationships, building trust and generating a reciprocal return via leveraged relationships;
- A negotiator and influencer, based on in-depth knowledge of the school and the wider university, able to generate effective compromises;
- A service provider, able to provide a brokerage service across the university on behalf of the Dean, facilitating new initiatives and partnerships;
- A resource manager, able to flex internal structures to achieve desired resource access or outcomes.

This provides the Dean with an extensive and effective skill set on which to draw.

### Key relationship attributes between professional manager and dean

- A partnership approach, embracing the complimentary nature of both skill sets, based on mutual trust and respect;
- Close working – including spatially – with opportunities for extended discussions outside of regular catch ups, to promote horizon scanning and creative innovation;
- Collaborative problem solving and decision making taking into account differing perspectives;
- A shared commitment to continuous improvement as a joint endeavour which is seen as such by colleagues in the wider university;
- A shared understanding of how responsibilities divide and where they are shared between academic leaders and professional managers;
- Mutual support both in meetings and in other communication forums, where each can be seen to be speaking in support of the other;
- Effective and proactive communication – professional managers do not like surprises, Deans even less so.

## Signposts to the professional managers' training and development matrix

The areas of professional competence or skill to support effective performance in the roles relationship include:

- acquiring business critical knowledge;
- managing information;
- problem solving/analysis;
- delivering service improvements;
- effective monitoring and control;
- leadership and team development;
- gaining, planning and deploying resources;
- utilising interpersonal communication/persuasion;
- developing and implementing policy;
- strategic planning;
- governance and internal relationships.

The Professional Managers Training and Development Matrix can be viewed [here](#).

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*Further information about the committee and its work can be found [here](#).*