



The Hybrid Administrator-scholar Paradigm in Higher Education Leadership in Africa

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Abstract

The higher education landscape has been in a state of flux since the turn of the twenty-first century owing to pressure to internationalise and adopt entrepreneurial approaches in response to global demands. These exigencies have not spared middle-level managers in the academy who straddle the divide between administration and scholarship. This article explores the administrator-scholar paradigm in the context of the globalisation momentum in the academy, using an autoethnographical approach, in which I examine my personal and professional experience as a department chair in two universities over a period of five years. The study pays particular attention to how the dual role was enacted and views the administrator-scholar phenomenon as a resource, not a problem, as explicated in existing research. I articulate the leadership qualities that middle-level managers – more particularly, heads of departments – need, to navigate the contested space and ambivalent landscape of higher education leadership. Institutional gaps and the absence of systemic socialisation led me to develop a domain acculturation model, Divergent Collaborative Leadership, which emphasises the administrator-scholar in the construction of professional identities in higher education in the African context.

Keywords: higher education, administrator-scholar, autoethnography, department chair, domain acculturation, Divergent Collaborative Leadership Model

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Résumé

Le paysage de l'enseignement supérieur est en pleine mutation depuis le début du XXI^e siècle en raison de la pression exercée pour l'internationalisation et l'adoption d'approches entrepreneuriales en réponse à la demande mondiale. Ces exigences n'ont pas épargné les administrateurs intermédiaires de l'université, qui se situent à cheval entre l'administration et l'enseignement. Cet article explore le paradigme administrateur-chercheur dans le contexte de l'élan de mondialisation dans le monde universitaire, en utilisant une approche auto-ethnographique, dans laquelle j'examine mon expérience personnelle et professionnelle en tant que Chef de département dans deux universités sur une période de cinq ans. L'étude accorde une attention particulière à la manière dont ce double rôle a été mis en œuvre et considère le phénomène administrateur-chercheur comme une ressource et non comme un problème, comme l'expliquent les recherches existantes. Je décris les qualités de leadership dont les administrateurs de niveau intermédiaire (plus particulièrement les chefs de département) ont besoin pour maîtriser l'espace contesté et le paysage ambivalent du leadership dans l'enseignement supérieur. Les lacunes institutionnelles et l'absence de socialisation systémique m'ont conduit à développer un modèle d'acculturation de domaine, le leadership collaboratif et démocratique (Divergent Collaborative Leadership), qui met l'accent sur l'administrateur-chercheur dans la construction des identités professionnelles dans l'enseignement supérieur dans le contexte africain.

Mots-clés : enseignement supérieur, administrateur-chercheur, auto-ethnographie, chef de département, acculturation de domaine, modèle de leadership collaboratif et démocratique.

Introduction and Background

Higher education institutions (henceforth HEIs), have been facing overwhelming pressure to conform to global twenty-first-century standards (Bartnett 2011; Kinyata and Siraje 2018). Exponential growth in student numbers coupled with alarmingly rapid technological advancements have transformed the role of administrators and scholars in the academy. The intensity and complexity of these roles escalates when the two roles must be assumed by one individual (Kinyata and Siraje 2018), in what I have termed the hybrid administrator-scholar paradigm. While the merging of administration and academia is a relatively ancient practice in the academe, scholarship on this phenomenon is limited to a conflation of the administration-scholarship enterprise experience as problematic (Simala 2015) to the smooth functioning of the two different, but related constructs.

Higher education institutions operate on three fundamental functional logics—research, teaching and service. Of these three, research and teaching focus on the overall aim of the transmission of epistemology. The creation and transmission of knowledge are the answers to the question of why HEIs exist (Kinyata and Siraje 2018), and traditional university administration focuses on compliance to the norms and establishment of order. This article examines the hybrid administrator-scholar phenomenon as a resource not a problem in the context of middle-level leadership in higher education.

A fundamental disconnect seems to exist where administration and academia are concerned. However, this article argues that the difference in role expectations does not necessarily have to imply discord. The integrity of the academy is centred on a dynamic academic enterprise supported by sound administration. Conversely, sound administration relies on a strong academic base that can transcend institutional boundaries to influence society and transform the world. Within this higher education ecosystem, middle-level managers can be described as the university employees who are tasked with the responsibility of running academic units, namely departments, schools, faculties, research institutes and centres. This article focuses on my experiences as both an academic and a department chair, known as head of department in other contexts.

The fundamental assumption driving this discussion is that middle-level managers, in their role as administrator-scholars, are strategically positioned to leverage their wide array of skills to foster innovative leadership and influence the performance of HEIs. There are hegemonies that exist regarding the production of knowledge and the enactment of practices in higher education institutions. These hegemonies are shaped by the generalised assumption of Western constructions as universal. Western conceptual schema and theoretical frameworks have been widely adopted and continue to be utilised in scholarship and administration without question (Oyewumi 1997, cited in Akioto 2011). In this work, my aim is to interrogate the practices that characterise the dual role of the administrator-scholar in higher education institutions in southern Africa, and to reflect on my journey in an attempt to glean critical learning points.

The Research Problem

The prevailing discourse conceptualises the combination of academia and administration as problematic, setting up individuals for failure either as academics or as administrators, or both. While the administrator-scholar phenomenon is a constant in higher education institutions, and is as old as the academy itself, it is viewed as a problem with inherent tensions

and ambiguities (Armstrong and Woloshyn 2017). This article, instead, examines the administrator-scholar phenomenon as a hybrid that has the potential to increase efficiency, effectiveness and excellence in operations.

There has not been any concerted and documented scholarly effort to problematise the administrator-scholar experience as a resource from which to construct a middle-level leadership methodology. The focus of this work, therefore, is to explore the administrator-scholar phenomenon, specifically the middle-level category that is common to universities in Africa as elsewhere in the global higher education sector. This remains a highly contested yet under-researched area within the higher education discourse on leadership.

There is a growing body of literature on higher education leadership, department chairs included (Armstrong and Woloshyn 2017; Bryman 2007). However, whereas narratives from the higher positions of dean and vice-chancellor have been sought in academic research, there is a lacuna regarding the voices of departmental chairs in the literature. Also visibly lacking is literature on middle-level academic leadership in Africa. This article, therefore, seeks to address this gap by presenting a divergent perspective of the administrator-scholar role in higher education institutions, using an autoethnographical lens. Using this approach allowed me to give voice to my experiences as a middle-level academic also involved in administration. My experiences, rendered in the first person, are not a mere evocative narrative, but rather represent a mirror of rich experiential data that can be viewed and interrogated, without the risk of exploiting a research participant.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to seek insights into how department chairs enact the complex and conflicting roles associated with the administrator-scholar paradigm, and draws from the autoethnographic narrative data that details my experiences at two universities in southern Africa.

Specifically, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What constitutes the administrator-scholar role in a university in Africa?
2. What leadership skills did I deploy in enacting my dual role as an administrator-scholar?
3. What structures and strategies can administrator-scholars harness to gain support, sustain resilience and improve performance in this role?

Literature Review

Situating the Department Chair in the Higher Education Ecosystem

Although there is abundant literature on higher education and HEIs, much of the research focuses on those in Western countries. Scholarly inquiry into African settings from an insider perspective are scarce. Given that higher education institutions have been traditionally known for their role in the production, application and dissemination of knowledge, and that higher education and national development are strongly related (Salmi 2017; Marginson 2018; Cloete, Bunting and Van Schalkwyk 2018), it is important to examine the role of middle-level managers, the administrator-scholars, at the centre of operations in higher education spaces.

The operations of higher education institutions have transformed significantly in the past four decades (Bartnett 2003; Kinyata and Siraje 2018) and have led to changes in the nature of leadership and in governance. The issues of leadership amid a constellation of other political, economic and social factors together present higher education as a contested space. It is useful to problematise the relationship between contestation and agency at this point, particularly with reference to the dual role of middle-level managers under discussion.

A confluence of factors affects the performance of middle-level managers. At department chair level, expectations are high in two constituencies. Having to satisfy two different sets of stakeholders, namely students and institutional management, and still function as a researcher engaged with current problems seeking solution in a particular discipline can be a daunting task.

Conceptualising the Hybrid Administrator-scholar Role

The integrated concept of administrator-scholar is not an entirely new phenomenon. It has been discussed by scholars, though briefly, under various labels, such as scholar-leader (Kinyata and Siraje 2018), manager-scholar (Armstrong and Woloshyn 2017) and administrator-academic (Carrol and Wolverson 2004). Kinyata and Siraje (2018) briefly broach the notion of a scholar-leader. Scholar-leaders, in this instance, are seasoned academics who are appointed into key leadership positions. The two researchers argue that the best universities have outstanding scholars at their helm. According to Kinyata and Siraje (2018), such scholar-leaders can improve the performance of a university. I find a useful and direct connection between their scholar-leader notion and the administrator-scholar paradigm that I posit as having the capacity to improve operations in all the functional logics of teaching, research and administration.

Defining the Administrator-scholar

The concept refers to academics who temporarily or permanently take on management and leadership roles in universities. These employees are distinguished from academic managers, who may be in human resources, finance, research, quality assurance or other specialised fields. A similar concept is that of manager-academic, a term that came from a project on 'New Managerialism and the Management of UK Universities' (Reed 2002). An effective departmental administrator should function as an advisor, colleague, facilitator, mentor and advocate for students and management.

The practice of academics who shift from the academy to participate in university politics or infiltrate policy spaces is an example of an opportunity where knowledge and experience can be used to transform existing practices (Murunga 2019). While administration is more about leadership, academia is about responsibility for teaching, student experience and research. Ironically, academic positions provide a fertile training ground for emerging leaders who specialise in creating and retaining academic integrity and credibility (Goodall 2009). Middle-level academics are in an advantageous position, where they can use their knowledge to influence policy and reclaim higher education's original mandate of knowledge creation to make a difference in society.

While the literature discusses the phenomena of administration and scholarship as complex areas of diverse activity in HEIs, my aim is to assess closely the way the department chair enacts leadership while straddling these two positions within their varying yet intersecting practices. The discussion will emphasise the points of interface where the margins become liquid and permeable, allowing overlaps.

Administration requires a mindset and organisational approach that is significantly different to that of academia. It entails the bureaucratic performance of tasks based on institutional policies. On the other hand, academia is predominantly preoccupied with teaching and research. It is centred on interpersonal interactions and the teaching of content in which one is an expert. Similarly, research is premised on inquiry into a field of interest, asking pertinent questions and systematically seeking solutions to existing problems to advance scholarship in a particular field. The questions why and how are addressed by the theoretical approach that conceptualises everything as framed by theory. In contrast, administration seems fixated on concrete results.

Assuming the role of administrator while still practising as an academic is seldom effortless. A significant and deliberate effort is required by an individual with an academic background to be absorbed into the rhythm of administration. In this case, a seamless coexistence of administration and scholarship remains more an ideal than a reality given the seemingly diverging and conflicting expectations of the two roles. Moreover, settling and operating productively and serenely within the dual administrator-scholar role is fundamentally a skill that is acquired as opposed to mere possession of knowledge of what the position entails. The process is not osmotic; it involves willing and continuous learning coupled with determined application with the purpose of yielding measurable results.

Contemporary settings call for a complex set of objectives, ever-changing expectations, a digitally literate student population and an innovative mindset. Fowler (2015) dismisses what she refers to as the old-fashioned notion of the tension and 'contest' between academia and administration, regarding it as an exhausted, redundant idea. She acknowledges that universities are complex institutions that have a broad spectrum of stakeholders to satisfy, but believes that partnerships between academia and administration have the potential to enhance the overall student experience by improving overall service. Acculturation is needed for an administrator-scholar to close the knowledge and skills gap. Just as an academic must undergo academic acculturation in order to be initiated into academic norms, discourse and culture, administration also requires acculturation into its practices.

Leadership and Challenges of Universities in Africa

In one of a series of blog posts that resulted from collaborations between the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Mba (2017) indicates that Africa has an estimated 1,650 higher education institutions. These HEIs are currently confronting challenges that require multiple stakeholder interventions to improve their operations, performance and contribution to wider society.

The value of higher education institutions lies in their capacity to positively contribute and shape the socioeconomic development of the countries in which they are located. However, there is a disconnect between needs and skills (Alabi and Mba 2012), which is evident in inadequate financing and the poor critical mass of quality faculty. Deficiencies in governance and leadership are fingered in a long list of causes of disconnects that perpetuate challenges in the higher education spaces in Africa.

Of interest in Mba's (2017) chronicle of Africa's higher education woes are the possible interventions that can be employed to revitalise higher education in Africa. Foregrounded in this project are the World Bank Group and development agencies. The Association of African Universities (AAU) has listed capacity-building in institutional leadership and management as one of a series of interventions that can improve the state of the academy in Africa. This article is interested in the reference to deficiencies in leadership, and the focus on interventions at the level of leadership and management. The leadership-capacity-academy-performance nexus resonates with this study on middle-level managers who straddle the administrator-scholar divide in the academy.

To summarise the picture of modern universities at a crossroads, Santos (2010) alludes to the challenge of answering strong questions with weak answers. In Robertson's (2010) interpretation, weak answers are shallow and uncontextualised. They are technical in nature and they fail to link issues to social and political phenomena. On the other hand, strong answers foreground the complexity of the task and the responsibility of actors in changing the status quo. This article is interested in developing paradigms of action in response to the question of the administrator-scholar dual role. I acknowledge that the question of how middle-level managers in their dual task can take the academy to higher levels of accountability and enhance the student experience is a fundamental one that needs a practical response.

Theoretical Framework

This ethnographic study employed concepts from career transition theories to adequately conceptualise career transition (Armstrong 2009; Bridges 2003; Hill 2003). Career transition theories are an appropriate theoretical lens for the exploration of an ethnography representing career transition and growth as in this study. Following Armstrong (2009) and Bridges (2003), individuals can encounter a variety of experiences during role change or role integration, such as anxiety and shock, as they traverse through unexpected territories and contexts. Unfamiliar spaces have the potential of temporarily destabilising comfort zones. Several elements come into consideration in career transitions – for example, personal and professional boundaries, including organisational culture. Furthermore, making sense of a significantly new role involves creating new relationships and acculturating to a new context and thus a new orientation (Louis 1980). The transition theories adequately illuminate how I enacted the transition, negotiation and mediation of spaces, meanings and positions that I encountered as I moved from one point in the academy to another.

Autoethnography as Method

This study is an autoethnographic analysis of my professional identity as an administrator-scholar in a higher education ecosystem. The work emerges from my personal and professional experiences as a middle-level academic in leadership, as department chair, in two institutions in southern Africa, from 2014 to 2019. I use an autoethnographic approach to facilitate an opportunity to examine my own experience in the role of departmental chair. The fundamental intention in my pursuit was to illuminate the characteristics and dimensions of the administrator-scholar role. I called this phenomenon the hybrid administrator-scholar paradigm, as I conceptualised it as presenting a model that could inform and transform the academy, returning it to its original mandate of being a social institution creating knowledge for the service of humanity.

One significant assumption that underpins the thesis of my argument is that there are essentially novel insights into the administrator-scholar role that can be assembled and harnessed by examining my memories and beliefs (Armstrong 2008). Furthermore, the narrative discourses through which we understand ourselves and the work that we do represent a valuable source of insight (Hayler 2011). This article explores how I articulate the hybrid, dual, ambivalent and contested role of department chair through narrative and how this informs and develops my professional identities. I use the plural “identities” here in recognition of the dynamic nature of identity. Identity is continuously being constructed and reconstructed in response to contextual complexities, uncertainties and ambivalences and this is true also within the higher education sector, particularly in universities. The study applies the analytic autoethnographic approach suggested by Anderson (2006). Anderson’s propositions on analytic autoethnography present a way of reframing and reclaiming autoethnography within the analytic ethnographic paradigm.

The term ‘autoethnography’ was coined by Hayano (1979) with reference to insider anthropologists who were researching their own people in their own social worlds and sub-cultures. This approach presents the researcher as deeply self-identified as a member, in the tradition of qualitative symbolic interactionism. The method of analysis employs tenets of the progressive/regressive method following propositions by Sarte (1963). Kierkegaard (1938) contends that while life is lived moving forward, it is only when we look backwards that we understand. To locate the most relevant experiences, I used various types of autoethnography, namely, narrative self-study writing and life-history interviews, as a lens through which to examine my memories, critical perspectives and lived experiences.

In undertaking the research, I referred to diary entries that I had made over the years as a middle-level academic. I also engaged in writing a self-narrative of my memories of the experiences that I had had of being a scholar and an administrator. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe this process as using one's own experience to examine a culture or sub-culture. In this case, I deployed my own memories of experience, which illuminated the path and allowed access to the sub-culture of the administrator-scholar role with reference to middle-level academics. I adopted Freire's (1972) call to his student collaborators to take possession of their lives. I took possession of my lived experiences to interrogate them for patterns, cultures and sub-cultures, and learning opportunities.

Autoethnographical research in essence confirms the truism that all writing is by definition creative and all reading, according to Denzin (2001), is interpretive. The researcher must remain visibly central. According to De Certeau, Jameson and Lovitt (1980), meanings that emerge from narrative may be perceived as a means of opposing institutional power. The argument is that intense singularities of personal stories have the capacity to challenge scientific discourses as they can eliminate 'time's scandals'. Identity and professional conduct are constructs whose construction depends on all the dimensions of self-narrative and self-storying and telling of lived experience within its historical, social and cultural contexts. The lived experiences of administrator-scholars can offer valuable insights into, and essential illumination of middle-level academic leadership. This article draws themes from these experiences discursively.

Autoethnography in Higher Education

Autoethnographical accounts that delve into the experiential understandings of higher education spaces are rare in literature, especially with reference to Africa. Instead, autoethnography as a methodological approach is visible in research by teachers in schools (Hayler 2011; Feuerverger 2011; Clandinin and Connelly 1995). Autoethnography, as a qualitative method, is preoccupied with bringing to the fore those aspects that are suppressed by analytic methods that marginalise emotions and subjectivities. In this way, it is possible to study lived experiences to extend theory and praxis (Davies and Gannon 2006). Autoethnography is a compelling method that does not reduce the reader's trust in the writer, but enhances authenticity and trust (Trahar 2013; Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis 1997, cited in Feuerverger 2011).

With reference to my study, my selected personal experiences as a department chair in two universities in southern Africa bring to the surface my own academic trajectory. Through autoethnography as a methodology, I

acquired valuable insights into the work and identity, not only of myself as a department chair, but also of department chairs in similar contexts in Africa and beyond. One realisation that dawned on me regarding this study is the risky nature of autoethnography as a research method. Following propositions by Brogden (2010), Armstrong (2008) and Sparkes (2002), making personal experience visible and opening it up to scrutiny is taking a risk because it creates an inevitable vulnerability. Furthermore, it is common for autoethnographers to be subjected to criticisms of self-indulgence (Sparkes 2002).

This autoethnographic study interrogates my status as an administrator-scholar at different levels and dimensions. The study carefully analyses my values, perspectives of administration and scholarship and how these are reflected in interactions with myself, positions and people encountered in my workspace. I asked myself difficult questions at a personal and professional level in this intense and reflexive process. In the manner of Bartnett's (2011) and Trahar's (2013) conceptualisation, I slowly initiated myself into the culture of beginning 'elephant in the room discussions', such as what it really means to be female and working in higher education at this point in time, questions about my identity as a black, African female academic in a male-dominated faculty and in a multicultural environment.

Delineating the Department Chair Position

A university department is an entity that is responsible for undergraduate- and graduate-level teaching, research, university service and community engagement. In all the institutions where I have worked, as an academic and as an administrator, the head of department is appointed by the vice-chancellor on the recommendation of the department. The position of department chair, also known as head of department in some universities, is an established faculty position. Armstrong and Woloshyn (2017) define the department chair as a multifaceted middle-management position that balances faculty and senior administration. In such a position, the chair has a departmental home that provides a base, legitimacy, money and other institutional support for teaching and research. There are complicating factors surrounding the chair position.

My experiences in the higher education landscape range from administration to a mix of administration and teaching, as illustrated in Table 1. In the first year of my appointment to department chair in 2014, and despite a complete administrative workload, as an administrator-scholar I was still controlled by the dictates of the academic promotion framework, which demands a fully fledged portfolio that reflects sound and satisfactory teaching, scholarly research, university service and community engagement.

Scholarship is a deliberate engagement, with a foundation that hinges on consistent and rigorous research. Amid ambivalence, hybrid leaders are called upon to weave administration into their existing career in scholarship. Despite the existence of somewhat rigid boundaries between academic and administrative roles, which engender reactions that border on animosity and condescension, middle-level academics handle duties and reside in these two worlds, traversing the controversies and turbulence at the interface. Interpersonal issues, animosity from fellow faculty members and petty jealousy from fellow administrators were some of the barriers to efficiency and excellence in the execution of my duties. To become an administrator-scholar, one rises through faculty ranks. Administrator-scholars are ordinary academics who have noteworthy credentials and the mettle to confront the ugly side of the academy’s running where the grease and grime of people management and implementation and execution nightmares are a reality. In all but the first of these posts, my academic and administrator-scholar roles were combined, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 2.1: Tracing the administrator-scholar trajectory

YEAR	INSTITUTION	POSITION
2010–2011	Midlands State University	Administrator
2012	Africa University	Scholar
2014–2016	Bindura University of Science Education	Administrator-scholar
2019	University of Fort Hare	Administrator-scholar

As I went back in time in my interrogation of the tensions and conflicts in the academy regarding administration and scholarship, I asked myself critical questions, which formed the framework of my autoethnography as follows:

1. What does it mean to be an administrator-scholar?
2. How do I perceive my role in relation to personal and institutional goals?
3. Why do I hold the beliefs that I have about the administrator-scholar role?
4. How do I think my perceptions inform and affect:
 - the practice of being an academic and an administrator at the same time?
 - the students I teach?
 - fellow academics?
 - senior management?

The business of trying to balance teaching, research and administration can leave you feeling as if you are going through what Hayler (2011) calls professional menopause. It is not uncommon to end up asking yourself

whether you are a middle-level leader or going through a mid-life crisis. Many administrator-scholars, including myself, have spent a considerable time in their professional life negotiating a series of ambivalences and contradictions (Edwards, Gilroy and Hartley 2002). This is similar to Armstrong and Woloshyn's (2017) description of the tensions and ambiguities that characterise the life of a department chair. It is true that administrator-scholars are unique in the orientation and execution of their professional and academic mandates. Their duties and responsibilities seem to be poles apart. As a result, leadership and management are needed on two fronts: the personal and the professional.

A middle-level academic leader needs first to manage the juggling and balancing act of being in the classroom as a lecturer and in the boardroom as a chair of meetings, without overlooking the pursuit of scholarship through rigorous research. This balancing act needs to be done before the incumbent engages in leadership of a unit, department, faculty centre or school. From a rudimentary standpoint, scholarship and leadership seem to belong to different worlds due to their basic tenets and approaches. However, they come together in the role of the twenty-first century middle-level academic, who is called upon to develop resources that facilitate the execution of the three functional logics of university operations – administration, teaching and research.

Entering Higher Education

I had been teaching English in secondary and high schools for more than a decade when I was head-hunted for an administrative position in the vice-chancellor's office at a prestigious university in the metropole. It is important to state that I had studied for an undergraduate degree at this university, from which I had graduated with a first class degree, hence, the consequent head-hunting for my unique skills and attributes. This grand entry into higher education happened at a time when I was studying towards a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics. Therefore, from the onset, I was straddling administration and scholarship in very particular ways: first as a postgraduate student, and later as a lecturer and postgraduate supervisor in addition to administrative responsibilities.

While numerous testimonials and accolades had come my way concerning my capabilities and work ethic, I could not help a sense of trepidation and ambivalence as I took this vertiginous leap into the higher education ecosystem. I will fast-forward my narrative to a career move that catapulted me to new levels as a full-time lecturer, part-time doctoral student and department chair in another big higher education institution. I assumed the position of department chair for a new Department of

Languages and Communication Skills that had formerly been a unit within the Department of Education. The stakes were high. It was the feeling you get when you are handed a blank page and asked to take your best shot and make your mark. This echoes what Hayler (2011) refers to as the invisible ink of expectation.

At all the institutions of higher learning where I have worked as an academic or administrator, or both, there was a yawning gap in mentorship at the time. There was never any deliberate hand-holding. No individual was appointed to nurture me into my academic or administrative position for a specified period to facilitate my initiation into academic or administrative culture and operations. Beyond course allocation for the undergraduate courses that I was teaching, and the appointment letter for the department chair position, there was no purposeful or systematic institutional process that moulded or acculturated me into the expectations of the university.

It was clear from the onset that this was how things were done and no one had ever insistently knocked on the door of Human Resources to query this omission. While I contemplated the consequences of demanding induction, I also acknowledged the price of antagonising human resources staff or the dean of the faculty over what easily could have been interpreted as a severe case of ignorance, inexperience and incompetence. Given the possibility of misinterpretation, I deliberately chose to self-integrate and self-acculturate with diligence and humility, all set towards executing my duties with persistence and efficiency.

Acculturation Shock: Straddling two Domains with Efficiency

Despite universities recruiting from the large pool of secondary and high-school teachers, there seems to be a general lack of recognition of the need to nurture entry-level academics for the teaching practices of academia or higher-education administration. To compound the situation are the large numbers of students in undergraduate classes – 150 students would be a very small class, given that most classes contain over 200 students for university-wide courses, a phenomenon many academics commonly face (McAlpine, Amundsen and Turner 2014).

The absence of what Portnoi (2009: 187) calls systemic socialisation, what I call *domain acculturation*, created the feeling that no one in the system cared enough about process and procedure, and, consequently, quality. It became urgent for me to ensure that I closed this gap in the best possible way with the limited resources at my disposal.

Navigating the Administrator-scholar Territory

Looking back on my diary entries as a rookie administrator-scholar, I am automatically drawn into the experiences, thoughts and feelings that I had at the time. My diary reflections in the first year of playing a balancing act, as what I have termed *a novice hybrid*, as an administrator-scholar, provide some indications about my identity and the role expectations:

4 April 2014

Appointment to Acting Department Chair. Talk about new world. Excitement? Trepidation too! So much to do so little time.

More diary notes detailing my experiences, voice and reaction are laid out in Table 2. I would be appointed in a substantive/permanent capacity as department chair only in 2016. However, as with all acting administrative posts, you are still expected to deliver, which contributes significantly to you getting the substantive appointment or not. It did not help that more established staff members treated me with condescension, as if saying, 'You can break your back, toil and spin, burn the midnight candle on this, but you will never get the substantive appointment!' Despite the negative energy, I persevered, consulting, researching, understudying, questioning and patiently and cautiously striving to perform with efficiency, effectiveness and excellence. On some days, it felt like walking on eggshells in combat boots. However, this ambivalence motivated me to become a result-oriented self, focusing only on performance.

The Unique and Hybrid Role of Administrator-scholar

Some of the activities that I engaged in as an administrator-scholar included chairing meetings, pursuing scholarly research, writing, publication, public engagement and teaching. On a typical day, as a hybrid leader, I had to demonstrate a blend of administrative capability and scholarship in readiness to answer the call of both. While standard practice at senior levels allows administrators to abdicate some of their teaching and/or research activities, at middle level, all things come to a head; the responsibilities of student achievement did not fall away because I had been appointed department chair.

In my autoethnographic study, I engaged in an exploration of my administrator-scholar experiences, describing the personal, interpersonal and professional experiences that shaped my identity during my complex journey. The perspicacious methodology gave voice to actions, behaviours and cultures of practice in higher education, which may enable others in

similar ecosystems to reflect on, understand, learn and cope with their unique experiences (Ellis 2004). Throwing light on the binaries and ambivalences surrounding my dual and hybrid identity as an administrator-scholar forced an important interrogation and illuminated opportunities for development, transformation and divergence. This study became a project in nuancing the micro practices that develop the professional and transform current attitudes, leading to frontier thinking where role duality and hybridity are seen as a resource not a problem.

Through consciously positioning myself and adopting Wenger's (1998) brokering approach, I selected scholar roles that could improve my administration, and administrator roles that could advance my scholarship, and transferred these elements efficiently. Through a hybrid identity, a multi-membership in both domains, I wove the two identities into one and consistently made sure that they informed each other's operations to stop myself from fragmenting psychologically and conceptually.

Discussion

Table 2 presents excerpts from the narrative diary entries, which detail experiences from the day I assumed duty as a department chair while retaining my duties as an academic, namely teaching, research, university and community service.

The excerpts are detailed personal, interpersonal and professional reactions, enactments and overall experiences of the dual role. The ambivalence and ambiguities are explored further in the discussion that follows.

Dilemma or Distinct Advantage?

As a middle-level leader, I encountered significant dilemmas that could also be viewed as opportunities. The challenges ranged from structural, institutional, interpersonal to personal. How I resolved them was contingent on my own biography, identity, ideology, the team in which I worked, the cultures and values of the institution and the challenges it faced, as well as the features of the higher education system within which it worked. Every dilemma has an opportunity for leadership growth on the flipside. Exploration, experimentation and grit are needed if one is to successfully navigate the slippery terrain of playing the devil's advocate.

Table 2.2: Experiences as an Administrator-scholar

Episodic Experiences	Mixed Reactions	Divergent Themes
**Day 1 Phenomenon AKA Clueless	Bewilderment Fear of failure Adaptation	Proactive attitude to capacity development e.g. leadership, performance, research training
**On-the-job training AKA At the deep end	Disbelief Decision to learn and learn more Stubborn resolve to thrive	Initiate and engage in mentoring relationships
Competing demands of teaching, research and administration (crossed over with teaching load)	Muddling Crafting personal standard operational strategy Priority setting	Form effective teams and networks
Bridging turbulent waters: agitated faculty vs aggressive management (departmental office space, setting the first meeting in two years)	Feeling like a ragdoll tossing in the ocean Switch to outcome-oriented mode, one goal at a time Compromise? Compassionate leadership approach	Conflict is relationship-building change leadership
Conflicts over work ethics	Play dead? Reclaim voice Display assertiveness Demand respect for the office	Hold an open door Encourage faculty to do Masters, PhDs
Research overshadowed by teaching and administration	Maintain new status quo Craft innovative teaching-related research topics or else	Scholarship equals academy Incorporate teaching into research and vice versa

(**Excerpts from personal narrative; extracted from diary entries, 2014–2016; 2019)

As an academic getting into administration while retaining my academic duties in 2014, I learnt that, contrary to the assumption of being ill equipped, I brought to the role considerable experience in student and stakeholder management. Navigating the unfamiliar terrain of being an insider of two camps, I soon discovered that I was at an advantage. No one knows students better than a lecturer does; no one knows management personnel better than a department chair does. I was suddenly equipped with valuable knowledge about two very important stakeholders and I could use this knowledge to improve the execution of my tasks. My knowledge of students, as an academic, influenced my approach to administration. Conversely, as an administrator, my practice as an academic was tinged with the hue of administration. I was constantly haunted by consequences of actions, practices and the danger of setting negative precedence.

As time progressed and I gained a firmer footing in faculty processes and management expectations, I learnt that, essentially, administration and scholarship exist on a continuum. This was a learning curve I discovered as I interacted with students, faculty and university management. I decided to perceive them not as representing opposing poles, but as two related domains existing in a continuum of practices that I could extrapolate from to feed into each other's functionality. As I went about my business as an administrator-scholar, I conceptualised an invisible thread that tied administration and scholarship together into a knot. Together they could be threaded through department operations. I gained insights into university operations from the vantage point of a dual lens, something I could never have done while standing on one side of the fence. I also gained insights into myself, my limitations as an individual caught up in the current of higher education. I could sense a possibility for the development of a paradigm of action to interface operations and smoothe the transition into the duality of administrator-scholarship.

Hybrid Role, Collaborative Competencies

From the experiences outlined in the diary entries, it is evident that the administrator-scholar phenomenon represents a hybrid position. Due to the mixed elements in their character, hybrids operate from the vantage point of access and power. As a department chair, I had access to two often conflicting and contradicting worldviews, namely university management and academia proper (teaching and research), and needed to bridge the gap. I found myself following the prospectus religiously, being constrained by policies, meetings and minutes, lecturing in the lecture hall one moment and then attending a conference in the next – it was all a milieu for the

gritty, not the faint-hearted. This picture implies that hybrids have the capacity to reconcile the two worlds through crafting and implementing policy in a context-responsive manner. Middle-level academics can empower the academy, neutralise management, call on accountability. As a change agent, I could initiate difficult conversations to bring about transformation in faculty processes.

Table 2.3: Shifting Towards a Divergent Collaborative Leadership Model

PARAMETERS	PRACTICES
Administrative culture	Seeking mentors Infusing experience from teaching and research to inform: leadership style, mentor choice policy in leadership
Scholarship culture	Seeking mentors In addition to disciplinary focus, engaging in inquiry to shape and enrich administrative leadership
Curriculum and pedagogic culture	Allowing student voice in curriculum and in pedagogic practice Dialogic facilitator approach
Interpersonal communication	People management and conflict resolution focusing on solutions
Personal Perspective and Gender	Infusing a feminine presence and perspective as a resource not a problem in a masculine dominated environment.

Table 3 illustrates the parameters that I listed in my diary entries and the divergent practices that I employed as a survival strategy. Institutional gaps and the lack of systemic socialisation led me to develop a domain acculturation model I called Divergent Collaborative Leadership, which emphasises the administrator-scholar in the construction of professional identities in higher education. From my experience, a potential model would include domain acculturation in specific spheres, such as administration practice, scholarship culture, pedagogy and interpersonal communication. Intentional support for hybrid leaders, such as mentoring, is important. Harmonising roles and dovetailing research with teaching and administration to achieve the academic mission is the preoccupation of an administrator-scholar. The hoops and curveballs sometimes catch the administrator-scholar unawares.

Maintaining scholarship as an administrator was yet another challenge that needed diligence and innovation for me to overcome. Time, funding, research collaborations and peer support were difficult to acquire without consistent searching. The possibility for stagnating in my scholarship was high, but academics are promoted on their credentials only, so I had to maintain my research alongside superb performance in administration, hence my striving for a healthy balance against all odds.

Conclusion

Amid burgeoning student numbers and dynamic workspaces affected not least by digital technologies and globalisation, higher education spaces remain fundamentally contested spaces. The complexity associated with the administrator-scholar paradigm is a further challenge. This study profiled my experiences as an administrator-scholar in the academy. The autoethnographic study I adopted gives a holistic perspective of the experiences of straddling the administration-scholarship space, from which insights for future practice can be gleaned (Ellis 2004). This article was an initial step towards deciphering patterns of academy-specific leadership behaviours and their impact on higher education institutions. Documenting and analysing my lived experiences as an administrator-scholar in higher education was a useful enabler for developing strategic ways of working and integrating the tasks for the dual role.

Through autoethnography, and using a hybrid administrator-scholar paradigm, I developed a conscious identity (Armstrong 2008) and the capacity to navigate from one domain of operation to another. This flexibility to traverse the two diverse but intersecting disciplines becomes threaded into a personal and professional practice of administration and scholarship through brokering (Wenger 1998). Autoethnography illuminated the acculturating nature of this hybrid position as it moulded me into the multi-dimensional role of administrator-scholar (Kinyata and Siraje 2018). This is in line with the demand for fundamental shifts outlined in the literature with reference to managing the self, people and position (Armstrong and Woloshyn 2017).

The experiences I had in the course of my dual career as an administrator-scholar over the past five years indicate that middle-level academics do not receive adequate support. Due to the absence of mentorship and systemic socialisation, I had to self-acculturate. Domain acculturation became my prerogative. This called on me to be innovative. The presence of senior administrators as mentors to train incumbents would offer an environment

conducive for fomenting insights into good practice as well as operationalising existing policies. I recommend mentorship and training of middle-level administrators for good practice in both policy and practice in higher education institutions. There is need for further research on the implications of mentorship policy on professional outcomes of middle-level professionals.

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