Challenging the profanity of management in higher education

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Abstract

Management and managerialism in higher education have become increasingly synonymous with the corruption of self-regulating institutions, with the disbandment of collegial governance, and with a general devaluation of traditional academic norms and values; they have become profane concepts. In this paper, this profanity is challenged, through an exploration of its reach into the actual practices of higher education. We conceptualise two versions of profane management: management as discursively profane and as practically profane. Using data from a Delphi study on perceptions of quality and quality management, we explore the usefulness of these concepts and discuss their value.

Keywords: higher education; quality; quality work; management; Delphi study

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Introduction

Since the early reform waves swept across European higher education systems in the 1990s and 2000s, management and managerialism in higher education have become increasingly synonymous with the disbandment of self-regulating institutions and collegial governance, and with a general devaluation of traditional academic norms and values (Macfarlane, 2015). Management has in many ways become a word with negative connotations in higher education, a term that implies the opposite of collegiality and academic self-governance, which, on the other hand, have reached almost sacred status within higher education literature and discourse, forming what Macfarlane calls a 'moral dualism' (2015). In this paper, we wish to challenge this profanity, by exploring how far it reaches into the actual practices of higher education. To explore this, we use data from a Danish Delphi study of the

views of managers, teachers, and administrative staff on how to improve the quality of higher education. The respondents in the Delphi Panel pointed to the importance and central role of higher education management in ensuring high-quality education. Given the public resistance towards professionalised management in Danish higher education, this finding sparked our interest in further exploring the nuances of resistance and how profanity is articulated within higher education institutions, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of profane concepts in higher education. The central questions explored in the manuscript, therefore, are *How do managers, teachers, and administrators perceive the role of management in ensuring quality in higher education?* And, *how may the concept of profanity help us understand the nuances of this perception?*

Theoretical framework—Higher education management and profanity

While the study was designed to be inductive, we do, however, base our analysis on some concepts that have a history within studies of management in higher education. With the increasing policy focus on accountability, transparency in governance structures, and the professionalisation of higher education institutions (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; de Boer & File, 2009), higher education governance literature has focused on *new managerialism* (Deem, 2020; Deem & Brehony, 2005), *new public management* (Bleiklie et al., 2011), and generally on *neo-liberalism* in higher education across the world (Mountz et al., 2015; Shore & Wright, 1999; Slaughter et al., 2004). These strands of literature have focused on overarching managerialism regimes and policy ideas, which carry with them particular notions of calculation, accountability, and performance measurement. Managerialism, in this way, can take many forms. In this paper, we define managerialism as 'an ideological configuration of ideas and practices' (Deem, 2020).

Another strand of literature focuses more on the practices associated with these regimes; for example, the widespread implementation of a variety of internal and external systems that were developed to monitor quality and strengthen managerial control of quality issues (Elken & Stensaker, 2018). A central task of these quality management systems is to monitor the quality of teaching and student activity to enhance students' learning experience. Thus, it is now common practice to establish entire quality assurance sections within the managerial structure of higher education institutions (Manatos et al., 2017). A number of studies have explored these systems of higher education quality production. Some of these

studies have focused on the setup and functioning of quality management and on the systems' unintended consequences—such as a horizontal de-coupling of the managerial and administrative functions from academic activities (Maassen & Stensaker, 2019) and excessive use of quality assessment and evaluations (Blackmore, 2009; Shore & Wright, 1999).

Management is a complex term and an even more complex task that is distributed among many individuals across various organisational levels (e.g., Department Head, Study Director, Rector, Dean, etc.). Scholars have indeed pointed to the complexity of managerial structures in higher education institutions (Birnbaum & Snowdon, 2003) and to the difficult conditions that managers may face due to resistance from teaching and administrative staff (Deneen & Boud, 2014; Kallio et al., 2016). However, other studies have also indicated that managers 'close' to the academic practice are, to some extent, protected from this scepticism and perceived to be 'one of our own' to a much higher degree than top-tier management (Degn, 2018; Deem et al., 2007), thus adding to the complexity.

As a theoretical or conceptual frame, we may discern between management as an idea or an abstract system—which may, to some extent, be equivalent to what we have described as managerialism—and management as an activity; that is, relating to the specific practice of management.

In our initial readings of the data, we found interesting tensions between acceptance and resistance towards management. To explore and better understand these tensions, we employed the concept of *profanity* in the analysis. The notion of profanity entails a perception of something as reprehensible or illegitimate, and coupled with the distinction between management above, we may talk about management as 'practically profane' or as 'discursively profane.'

Discursively profane, in this paper, signifies the overall resistance and denouncement of the *concept* or *idea* of management. We argue that when something is discursively profane, it is the idea that is seen as reprehensible, rather than the actual enactment of that idea. This could be because it is seen as being in contradition with norms and values within a certain field, and thereby illegitimate. On the other hand, management as practically profane means that *practical application* of an idea is viewed as reprehensible. This indicates that specific practices, such as those of management, can be seen as illegitimate and wrong because they break with existing practices.

By distinguishing between these two versions of profanity, we wish to emphasise how there might be differences in how management is perceived as a practice or an activity and how it is described and perceived as a concept or phenomenon. It is also the assumption that these two phenomena are not necessarily

closely linked. Our working assumption is that something which is profane in one of these respects may at the same time be legitimate in the other. Whether this assumption holds, in the case of management, will be addressed further in the discussion section of this paper.

The Danish case of quality management

The Danish case is interesting, when exploring management as practically and discursively profane, for two reasons. Firstly, the higher education system in Denmark has over the past decades been reformed continuously, targeting both the governance and management structures of higher education institutions, (seemingly) making them more autonomous and professionalised (Bendixen & Jacobsen, 2020; Degn, 2015). This remodelling of the managerial setup is by no means unique in a global or European perspective (Degn, 2015;Wright & Ørberg, 2008; Ørberg & Wright, 2019), but as several studies have pointed out, the Danish Higher Education reforms have been rather extensive and proactive in comparison to, for example, the rest of the Nordics (Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014). The reforms have—likely due to this proactive nature and the intensity of the reforms—been met with massive and outspoken resistance from academic staff, most recently materialised as a petition signed by many prominent Danish academics to revise the University Act of 2003, which introduced professionalised management structures and institutional self-ownership. Such resistance thus indicates a high level of discursive profanity surrounding management, a claim which is also supported by previous studies of Danish higher education management reforms, where the resistance to management as a general concept is evident (Andersen, 2017; Wright & Ørberg, 2008).

Secondly, and interestingly, when contemplating the number of reforms that have impacted the Danish higher education system over the past decades, no specific quality reform has been proposed in Denmark even though quality is often used to legitimise reforms in higher education (Pechmann & Haase, 2021). This is in contrast to, for example, the other Nordic countries. The major legislative changes introduced in direct relation to higher education quality relate to the implementation of the accreditation scheme in 2013. Here, the Danish Accreditation Agency was established, an external agency charged with conducting institutional accreditation of the Danish higher education institutions, thereby phasing out programme accreditation, which had been the preferred accreditation scheme since 2007 (Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2017). The accreditation process and

guidelines require (among other things) that the individual higher education institution set up a quality management system, thereby anchoring quality work within the managerial system of the institutions.

The Danish case is characterised by a very extensive degree of external pressure, as exemplified by the accreditation system and the intensity of reforms, and by a comparatively high degree of institutional autonomy and managerial discretion, coupled with a high degree of discursive managerial profanity. This makes for an interesting case to explore whether we also see 'practical managerial profanity'; that is, whether there is also a resistance and scepticism towards practical management measures in the case of quality management, or whether the resistance is mostly present at the discursive level.

Materials and methods

To explore this open question, we make use of data from a Delphi survey on quality in higher education conducted as part of the Pathways for Improving Quality in Higher Education (PIQUED) project (Bloch et al., 2020).

The Delphi technique is a 'communication structure aimed at producing a detailed critical examination and discussion' of a selected issue and has a fairly long history of use within educational research (Green, 2014, p. 1). In short, the Delphi method consists of a survey sent out in multiple rounds to a panel of selected participants, in order for them to verify and provide nuance to findings from initial rounds. The advantage of the Delphi technique is that it overcomes disadvantages of single-expert and one-shot group discussions by mapping experts' and stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs, or opinions on a chosen issue (Chang Rundgren & Rundgren, 2017).

The PIQUED Delphi study consisted of two rounds, both including open and closed questions (ranking batteries). Only two rounds is fewer than most Delphi-studies. The main reason for this is that the goal of the survey was not to reach consensus, but to map different conceptualisations of higher education quality and recommendations for quality improvement. Round 1 probed quality conceptualisations and perceptions of educational objectives among stakeholders, while round 2 investigated areas of contention from round one: employability, the place of research in higher education, the purpose of higher education and management of quality work, the latter being the main focus of this paper. In the first round, the respondents of the Delphi panel placed great importance on the management of higher education to ensure high-quality education. Consequently,

the subject of management was explored even further in the second round, asking the panel how management best manages the teaching staff to ensure high quality in education. Thus, this paper is a spin-off study utilising the Delphi data on management to further explore the empirical manifestation of profane management.

The panel consisted of 248 respondents in total, representing management, teaching staff (lecturers and researchers, referred to as 'teachers' herein), administrative staff (primarily quality department employees), students, and external stakeholders from a broad range of Danish higher education institutions and types of education. In the present study, we only include the responses from managers, administration, and teachers in the dataset, thereby excluding non-employees, as the focus of the study is on the interplay between managers and staff. Hence, the subsample used in this study included 167 respondents for round 1; 89 respondents for round 2. The rather high attrition rate from the first to the second round may be explained by a high number of open questions in both rounds, which placed greater demands on participants.

Analytical strategy

Quantitative data were analysed based on descriptive statistics. However, because the sampling process of the panel prioritised the depth of attitudes over the representativity of the sample, the sample is not representative; and some conclusions may be exaggerated or underestimated. Additionally, though the sample includes stakeholders from all three types of higher education institutions in Denmark (business colleges, university colleges, and universities), university staff are overrepresented, especially among teachers and administrative staff. For these reasons, quantitative analyses rely on descriptive statistics only.

The open responses in the Delphi survey that regarded management were imported as a dataset into NVivo and all qualitative comments were coded systematically. We coded the data in two cycles (Miles et al., 2014). A first round of coding was inductive, allowing the qualitative responses to define the codes. This resulted in 46 different codes that were analysed and grouped into four main categories according to the themes of the article. We carefully defined the main codes and subcodes within each category to develop a codebook guiding the coding of the second cycle. Finally, based upon the codebook, all qualitative comments on management were systematically recoded to ensure high coding reliability (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). In total, qualitive comments by 83 panellists were coded (see codebook in appendix).

Results

Our ambition was, as mentioned, to gauge the 'practical profanity' vs. the 'discursive profanity' of management. In the following, we will start by presenting results on how teachers, administrators, and leaders perceive quality in higher education. As mentioned in the methods section, this was one of the main purposes of the PIQUED Delphi study and led to the further exploration of management in relation to this.

How managers, teachers, and administrative staff perceive the quality of higher education

The PIQUED Delphi study investigated stakeholder views on quality by asking panellists to select the five most important purposes from a list of 13 items, asking them to evaluate the items with regards to the educational programme with which they were most involved in their everyday practice. The list of items was inspired by the Danish Qualification Framework for Higher Education and by general notions of transformative and societal purposes of higher education present in Danish political discourses and debates about higher education (Andersen & Jacobsen, 2017). Figure 1 shows the results of the panellists' selection.

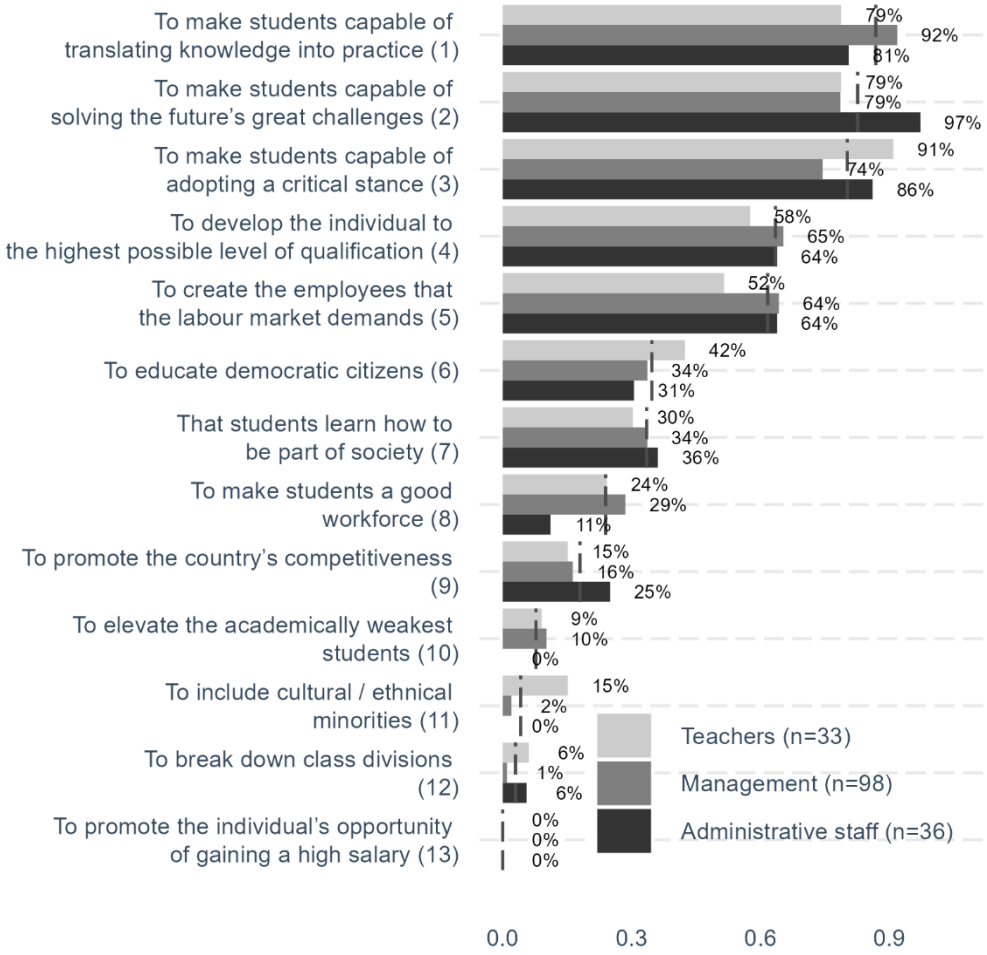

Figure 1. *Managers, teachers, and administrative staff's view on the purpose of higher education*

Note. Question wording: 'Below, we have listed in random order a number of purposes for higher education that different actors have. Tick the five purposes that you find most important for the education (s) that are closest to your work.' The dashed line is mean of subgroup means (i.e., all three subgroups are weighted equally). N=67; 33 academic staff, 98 managers, 36 administrative staff.

As shown in Figure 1, the highest ranked item was 'to make students capable of translating knowledge into practice.' This was followed by 'to make students capable of solving the future's great challenges' and 'to make students capable of adopting a critical stance.'

Looking at the overall patterns of the panellists' prioritisation, panellists seemed to prioritise core academic qualifications and the application of academic

knowledge to practice (items 1, 3 and 4). In the qualitative comments, the prioritisation of academic skills was explained by a manager who argued that strong academic skills are a prerequisite to fostering graduates capable of solving yet unknown challenges of the future:

> We must educate graduates who get jobs—this benefits the graduates, the companies and society. The graduates who get jobs master their subject; they are reflexive, and they are capable of translating knowledge into practice. They do not possess specialist knowledge or competences requested by the labour market today, but their academic skills make them capable of contributing to the development of the company in the future.

Furthermore, panellists chose items that relate to societal needs (items 2 and 5). In contrast, egalitarian and democratic responsibilities of higher education (items 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12), and producing individual or societal economic growth (items 8, 9 and 13) received lower pick rates, all being picked by 50% or fewer respondents. It is important to note that the pick rate only shows how many respondents chose the item as one of the five most important purposes of higher education. The numbers do not reveal which items were considered the sixth or seventh most important item.

Nevertheless, our results indicate a high consensus between managers, teachers and administrative staff on the key purposes of higher education. The top three items received more than 70% pick rates across all groups; and across all items, the pick rates of three employee groups were roughly in line. The high level of consensus observed is somewhat surprising given the managers', teachers' and administrative staff's different roles in the higher education system. It is also surprising since several studies have pointed to conflicts between teachers and management and administration, due to the increased managerial influence on teaching at the expense of the influence of teachers (Barandiaran-Galdós et al., 2012; Cardoso et al., 2016; Damsgaard, 2019). This consensus is also somewhat surprising, given the high degree of discursive profanity associated with management in Denmark in general.

The three main employee groups within the Danish higher education system thereby seemed to agree on the most central purpose of higher education: academic skills. It is important to remember, though, that this agreement between managers, academics and administrative staff may be somewhat overestimated, as panellists participating in a study on educational quality may potentially be more invested in higher education debates than the average employee, and thereby more exposed to dominant discourses.

The role of management in relation to quality work—Is management also practically profane?

Management's role in, and responsibility for, quality in higher education was one of the main themes emerging from the first Delphi round. Both in the quantitative and qualitative responses of the first Delphi round, the panellists indicated that control systems, monitoring and performance management have gone too far, hindering quality in education and leaving a call for pedagogical management as well as a call for teaching competence development (Bloch et al., 2020). The role of management in relation to quality in higher education was therefore further explored in Round 2 of the Delphi in a survey battery containing 14 statements about management and educational quality. For reasons of analytical coherence, we have excluded a 15th battery statement on international mobility and international students from our analysis.

In the present study, we categorise these statements into three analytical groups or management styles: *management through teaching specifications* (7 items); *management through incentives and acknowledgement of teaching* (3 items); and *management through co-operation and co-influence* (4 items). The respondents' perceptions of each management style are presented below.

Management through teaching specifications: Among the 14 statements, seven concerned management of teaching and teachers, exploring the panellists' view on how best to manage and secure quality teaching. Figure 2 provides an overview of the responses. In general, our results showed positive attitudes towards managers' involvement in higher education teaching, also across employee groups. In particular, high support was given to prioritisation of pedagogical/didactic competence development (91%), systematic and continuous control of teaching quality (80%) and methodological freedom in teaching (76%). In contrast, strong opposition was expressed to the claim that that management should state the desired and accepted teaching methods (69% either disagreed or strongly disagreed). The latter is the only item out of the seven of which a majority disagreed rather than agreed.

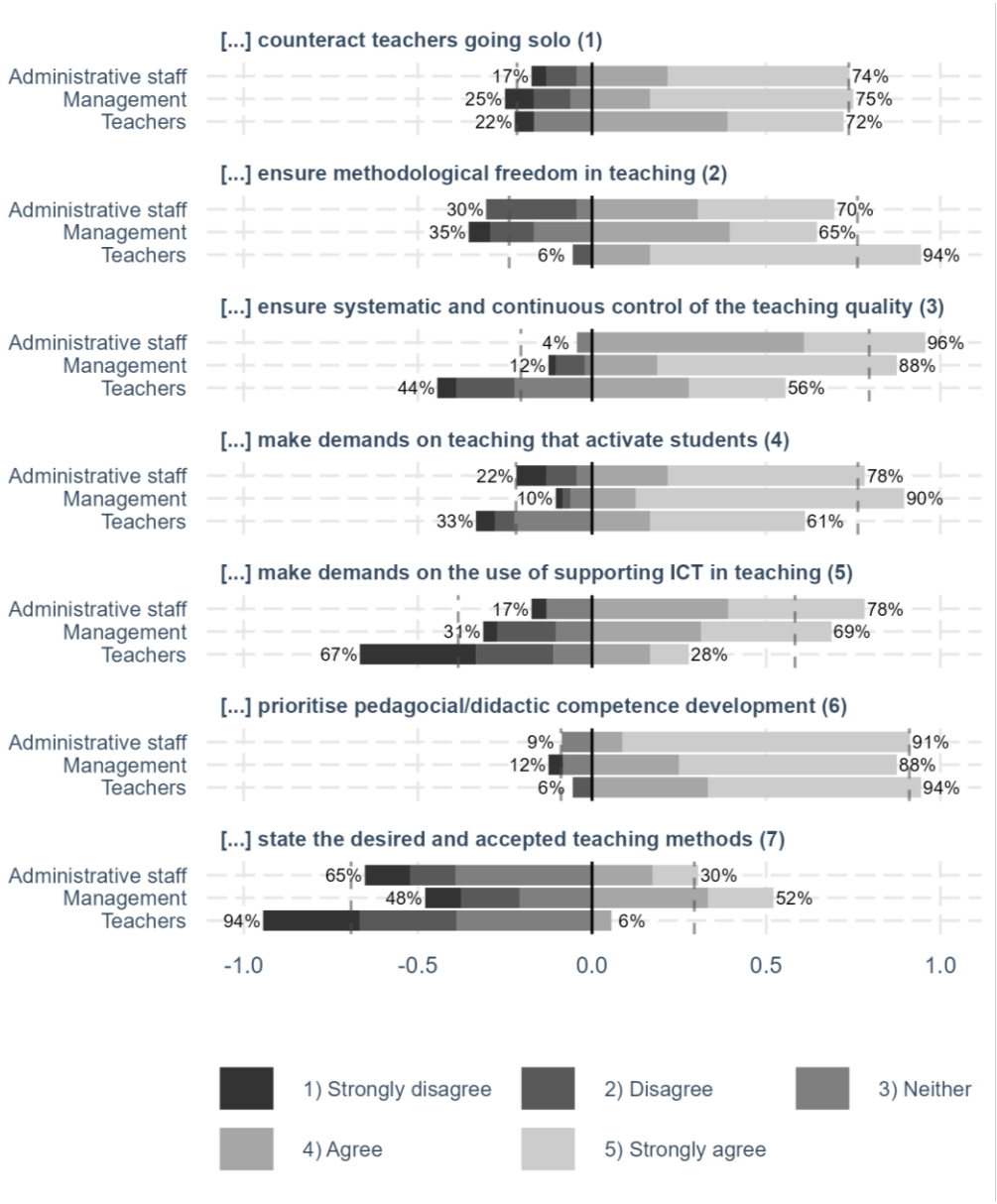

Figure 2. *Standards and demands: Management must […]*

Note. Percentages across levels of agreement in the three employment groups. Some categories do not sum to 100%, as 'don't know' is not shown, but included in calculations. N = 89; 18 teachers, 48 managers, 23 administrative staff. The dashed line is mean of subgroup means (i.e., all three subgroups are weighted equally).

This overall support for management indicates that practical management profanity is quite low; but looking at the three groups of panellists, the teachers were most sceptical about some types of management involvement. They opposed

managers' direct involvement in teaching, with only 6% in support of managers stating 'desired and accepted teaching methods' and fewer than 30% in support of managers making demands on information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching. Similarly, the teachers showed low support for managers' responsibility for the systematic and continuous control of teaching quality, whereas they agreed with the statement of methodological freedom in teaching to a much higher extent than did managers and administrative staff. This indicates some degree of practical managerial profanity; that is, that teachers find the practical implementation or enactment of management illegitimate and unwanted.

In the qualitative comments, we saw an interesting parallel to the overall differentiation between discursive and practical resistance posed in this analysis. As some teachers noted, for example, they were opposed to strict *demands* on the use of ICT in teaching, but not to ICT as a practical and didactical tool. As explained by one teacher:

> ICT should not be mandatory in class. It should be used didactically when it makes sense and is relevant. In my experience, the students are supportive of ICT-free teaching in class when there is no need for it. So, ITC should be used wisely.

The teachers' low support for systematic and continuous control of teaching quality seem to again underline the resistance to overall management measures. Also, in the qualitative comments, the teachers were more sceptical towards evaluations, arguing that they do not enhance quality, they only add to bureaucracy, whereas managers to a larger extent expressed both positive and negative views regarding evaluations. Again, this suggests support for the argument that the teachers, to some extent, view management as practically profane, as evaluation are a very practical management measure being denounced by the teachers.

On the other hand, our results suggest a general *demand* for management-led enhancement of a collaborative culture, exemplified by the fact that 70 to 75% of managers, teachers and administrative staff agree that managers should counteract teachers 'going solo,' in the sense that they act without considering the practices or needs of others (colleagues etc.). Supporting this finding, a high number of the qualitative comments (30 panellists) explicitly stressed the importance of collaboration among teachers and of professional feedback and discussion in relation to teaching. To a large degree, this is a call for management to handle the 'private-practice teacher'; that is, the teacher for whom teaching is a private matter that is not discussed among colleagues. As one teacher explained:

> We have enough performance-enhancing initiatives […] so, for me, it is definitely the opportunity to work with competent teams of teachers that is most important; for example receiving support for collaborative course development, education or other education projects, and support for double staffing in certain situations. We have many competent teachers/colleagues—and they become competent first and foremost through collaboration and mutual inspiration in relation to specific tasks.

Where teaching collaboration was generally praised by the panellists, they also stressed that freedom of choice with respect to teaching methods was important for the individual teacher. As noted by one teacher, the local management must find 'the right balance between common agreements on good practice and the level of freedom of choice needed to teach according to the learning styles of each class.'

The request for collaborative teaching cultures and pedagogical teacher competence development, to a large extent, supports previous research (Bloch et al., 2020; Scott & Scott, 2016), but importantly also highlights how practical profanity is limited and how there seems to be a legitimate place for local management in facilitating this and demonstrates the support of this from both teachers, managers and administrative staff.

Summing up, our results suggest support for an active, but specific *practical* role of managers in ensuring quality teaching by facilitating and supporting teaching and competence development rather than dictating specific teaching demands. Interestingly, though several of the items may be considered conflicting, they were all assessed positively by the panellists. For example, the panellists agreed that management should counteract teachers 'going solo,' as described above. However, at the same time, they also highly valued methodological freedom in teaching. They were opposed to management stating desired teaching methods, but in support of management systematically and continuously controlling teaching quality. The results indicate that management of teaching is a complex issue representing various trade-offs, and that practical profanity is also complex, in that some measures may be seen as reprehensible whereas others are legitimate.

Management through incentives and acknowledgement of teaching: The second management approach was management through incentives and acknowledgement of teaching. Here, the panellists were asked to state their level of agreement with three statements: whether managers should address and identify excellent teaching (item 1), whether they should reward talented teachers (item 2) and whether

teaching competences should give the individual teacher more merit (item 3). Figure 3 gives an overview of panellist responses.

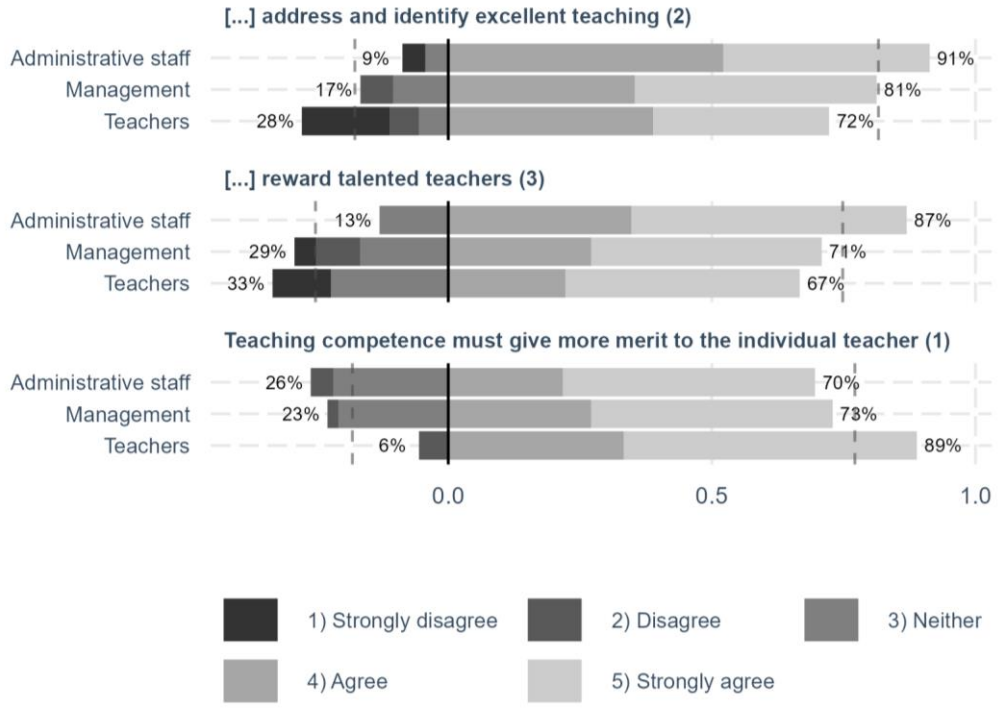

Figure 3. *Incentives and acknowledgements: Management must […]*

Note. Percentages across levels of agreement in the three employment groups. Some categories do not sum to 100%, as 'don't know' is not shown but included in calculations. N = 89; 18 teachers, 48 managers, 23 administrative staff. The dashed line is mean of subgroup means (i.e., all three subgroups are weighted equally).

In total, 81% of the panellists agreed or strongly agreed that management should address and identify excellent teaching. Furthermore, 77% supported the claim that teaching competence must give more merit to the individual teacher, whereas 75% agreed that management should reward talented teachers. These results indicate a high level of consensus regarding more acknowledgement of, and rewards for, great teaching. Managers, teachers, and administrative staff all agreed that quality teaching should be acknowledged and rewarded, with no group having below 67% in agreement for any item.

Our quantitative results show support for the statement that management must reward talented teachers, but this support is nuanced by the panellists' qualitative responses; particularly by panellists employed at the university. In the

comments, the panellists generally expressed support for the claim that recognition of great teaching may lead to higher educational quality, but they disagreed as to how recognition should be shown. Six panellists argued that a cultural change was needed in which good teaching is valued, prioritised, and shared by management. This point of view is expressed by the following statement:

> 'Reward'—it depends on the specific content of the reward. Teaching prizes do not make any sense. For some, a qualification bonus rewarding teaching competences might matter, but for most people it matters more that the management really acknowledges and values great teaching and acknowledges and prioritises great teaching when making decisions (Teacher, university).

In contrast, two managers in the panel pointed to risks associated with creating a more competitive environment by appointing and rewarding excellent teaching, arguing that this may, in fact, impede the quality of education as teachers may come to focus on entertaining students to gain their support rather than educating them.

Interestingly, in the qualitative comments, five the panellists favoured individual merit over rewards, arguing that good teaching should be just an important criterion—as good research is—in the appointment of positions. In the qualitative comments by the teachers, a rather large share addressed a biased system that favours excellent research over excellent teaching, especially with respect to appointment for positions. One teacher called teaching a 'left-hand-job' with 'low prestige compared to research.' This view was also supported in the comments by a few managers and administrative staff.

The discussion of a biased system favouring research over teaching was more present at the universities. This might be because research activities are a fairly new practice at business and university colleges, which, in Denmark, were granted the right and obligation to do research in 2013. Whereas the battle between teaching and research is not new (Scott & Scott, 2016), the present study showed that the discussion also is present in the Danish universities, despite a general consensus that great teaching ought to be acknowledged and rewarded more as a means to improve quality in higher education.

Overall, the results regarding this management approach indicates that management is indeed seen as practically legitimate when it comes to rewards and incentives.

Management through co-operation and co-influence: The third management approach was management through co-operation and co-influence. Here, the panellists were asked to evaluate four items about access to influence and for whom. Figure 4 displays the results.

Figure 4. *Co-operation and co-influence: Management must […]*

Note. Percentages across levels of agreement in the three employment groups. Some categories do not sum to 100%, as 'don't know' is not shown but included in calculations. N = 89; 18 teachers, 48 managers, 23 administrative staff. The dashed line is mean of subgroup means (i.e., all three subgroups are weighted equally).

The two items receiving the highest support were the claims that management should ensure teachers' co-influence on educational development (97% support) and on quality assurance (94% support). The claim that management should ensure students' influence was also supported (75% support), as was the final statement that management should facilitate collective action towards development (90% support). The quest for collective action is also visible in the

qualitative comments, where six panellists argue that both students, teachers, managers and other stakeholders must be included and involved in the development of teaching and education. For these final two items, teachers seemed slightly less supportive than the other groups, but the results still indicate the same pattern as in the previous section, with some level of practical legitimacy.

In general, our results showed high levels of agreement between groups, with slight differences on the items regarding students' influence and demands for collective action. These differences showed a familiar pattern of teachers being slightly less enthusiastic about management intervention than administrative staff and management. However, this pattern is also nuanced, and in the following section, these variations and how they may be understood in the light of discursive and practical resistance is discussed.

Discussion

The purpose of the present article was to explore whether higher education management in Denmark is perceived as 'practically profane' as it is 'discursively profane.' As demonstrated above, we see that there are actually high levels of consensus among teachers, administrators, and managers themselves on both the ideal purposes of higher education and the role that management should play in securing and fostering quality in higher education. This indicates that while management might be discursively profane, there is at least some agreement at the practical level that management has a legitimate role to play, specifically in relation to ensuring and enhancing quality in higher education.

This schism between practical and discursive profanity is also echoed in the literature. For example, some studies have suggested that quality has developed from being a professional concern residing within the realm of the teachers, to increasingly being seen as an administrative and managerial concern, thus distributing the responsibility more widely in the organisations (Damsgaard, 2019), while others suggest that this might create tensions and conflict between teachers and administrators/managers (Barandiaran-Galdós et al., 2012; Cardoso et al., 2016). We have, with this small study, provided nuance by highlighting that discursive resistance to and practical appreciation for management may indeed co-exist, and that practical resistance to management does not necessarily follow automatically when discursive resistance is high.

Having reached this conclusion, the question becomes, Which kinds of management are practically appreciated and even sought, and which types of

management fall under the discursively profane? Our findings suggest several things in this regard. Firstly, we observed strong support for management-facilitated and management-encouraged competence development and for managers ensuring teachers' influence on education development. As such, it seems that there is support for management to not only bear the responsibility for contributing to quality, but also to ensure that teaching staff has direct influence. Secondly, respondents expressed support for the implementation of quality assurance instruments and management-facilitated student influence on education development. Conversely, direct involvement of managers in the choice of teaching methods received low support from the participants. Hence, our findings indicate practical appreciation occurs when managers take a facilitating role rather than when they are directly involved.

Further refining this, in the analysis, we grouped the items relating to management quality measures into three groups, each representing a particular approach to management: management as *teaching specifications*, management as *incentives and acknowledgement*, and, finally, management as *co-operation and co-influence*. This echoes other studies that have pointed to the role of management as being suspended between 'structural management' and 'cultural management' (Solbrekke & Stensaker, 2016); the former encompassing many of the same elements that we found in our second category (Gibbs, 2010; Gibbs et al., 2008). In contrast, cultural management implicates, among other things, stimulating a collective approach to teaching, securing co-operation and co-influence among teachers, administrative staff, and students (Bryman, 2007; Scott et al., 2008; Solbrekke & Stensaker, 2016). However, our findings additionally indicated that managers, teachers, and administrative staff alike emphasised a role that what we might coin '*professional management*,' encompassing the first category related to specifying teaching standards. Even though we did observe that teachers were more sceptical towards direct interference (e.g., in terms of dictating teaching methods) than the other groups, the study showed an overall positive attitude towards management that facilitates a collaborative culture, supports student-activating teaching and sets clear goals and visions for teaching and education.

The request for a new 'professional management' thus further adds to the complexity of the managerial role in higher education. As mentioned in the introduction, managers in higher education institutions—particularly middle managers—are faced with many dilemmas, including resistance from staff, pressures from external sources and top-level managers, as well as a rapidly expanding task portfolio (Degn, 2015). Additionally, in the Danish higher education system, managerial responsibilities are highly distributed and the responsibility for

educational management does not rest unequivocally with any single leader. Rather, the managerial roles and activities that follow from the three managerial approaches or roles described above are distributed between top-tier management, department heads and heads of study, etc. We therefore argue that it is potentially very difficult to describe these roles of management in a concise and consistent way, even if there is, as we have shown here, broad consensus about their usefulness.

The unclear roles might also be part of the explanation to the widespread notion of management as discursively profane; when management seems to be everywhere and control-oriented, but at the same time somewhat invisible, then resistance seems to be high; but, when management is close, practical, and inclusive, then resistance is lower.

In the present study, we have therefore challenged the notion of management as unequivocally profane and attempted to come closer to the types of management measures viewed as appropriate by various stakeholders, thus also answering the call made by earlier scholars in the field (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010). We have concluded that a very high degree of consensus exists on the ideal purpose of higher education and on the management measures that should be used to foster quality in higher education. Future studies could potentially further investigate the nature of different roles in higher education management, conduct in-depth analyses of how managers at different organisational levels work (together) to fill these roles, and describe the circumstances under which they succeed.

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