

An organised anarchy or a community of diverse virtue ethics? The case of the Elam School of Fine Arts*

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ABSTRACT *There is a widely accepted myth in New Zealand that the Elam School of Fine Arts in the University of Auckland is an organised anarchy, internally divided and cantankerously unbiddable, and further, that this is largely inevitable given the nature of artists and designers. Its unique culture, however, is shown in this paper to have been generated and reinforced over decades by the exigencies of environment, partitioned and media-based curricula structures, intense and volatile relationships, and, occasionally, inappropriate leadership services. This history has created a culture of exuberant individualism, high productivity and disciplinary sectionalism. And yet, despite this history, Elam has sustained a major role in shaping New Zealand's cultural identity, and continues to produce some of the countries most outstanding visual artists and designers. The paradox involved is partially explained by persistent evidence of self-managing teams, creative problem-solving, and independent excellence, that together suggest deep and plural commitments to a virtue ethic.*

Introduction

In their classic study, Michael Cohen and James March (1986) used a 'management by objectives' (MBO) framework to evaluate the organisational and developmental assumptions of universities. They concluded that universities are not managed at all. And, since they were uncertain about ends, teaching using low technology, and had fluid participation in governance, Cohen and March theorised that universities were actually organised anarchies. This paper puts their theory to an empirical test using an cultural and historical case analysis of a university school regarded by many as one of the most anarchic in New Zealand.

The original 'Elam School of Art and Design' was established in 1889 using a bequest of £6,474 made by Dr John Edward Elam (1833 - 1888). The Auckland City Council "granted a tenancy of three rooms in the Public Art Galley and Library Building" (Franks, 1984, p. 4), under the bell tower, in what is now the Auckland City Art Gallery. It "started as a free school, in line with Victorian egalitarian ideals, to teach art and design, with the intention of helping to create job opportunities for the

underprivileged” (Saunders, 1990, p. i). From that time to this it has encountered major challenges that have reshaped its character. These challenges will be shown to have affected Elam’s capacity to act collectively as a School, to attract support from the University of Auckland, and to influence the history of art and art education in New Zealand (Calverley, 1937; Beatson and Beatson, 1994).

Buildings

The quality of accommodation in Elam is an example of a long-standing determinant of development that has often been embarrassing to its owners, frustrating to successive directors and a source of resentment for staff and students. By 1914 Elam had outgrown its three rooms and other temporary classrooms in Coburg Street and moved into new four-storied building in Rutland Street, built by the same bequest. In the early 1930s, a fire in a neighbouring building and a severe earthquake in Napier led to a survey which found it to be unsafe (Daly-Peoples, 1990, p. 4). The Auckland Board of Education then moved Elam in 1933 into the original building of Auckland Grammar School in Symonds Street to share space with Adult Education and the Workers Educational Association. This gracious if overcrowded home, however, burned down in 1949, with artist John Weeks losing personal works valued at £2,400 that had been gathered for an exhibition (Franks, 1984, p. 25).

Under its new (and current) ownership, the University of Auckland, Elam was then moved in 1950 onto two separate sites. Unfortunately, this put painting, sculpture, library and administration into the shabby ex-Newton West Primary School, and design and other workshops into a disused theatre in Symonds Street. This move overlaid the already sectionalised English art school curriculum model with conditions that further encouraged factionalism among staff, conditions that were then exacerbated by the enrolment crisis in the 1950s.

In 1958 the New Zealand Army requested the return of the primary school site. The Minister of Education, Mr. P.O.S. Skoglund, then suggested to Chancellor Hollis Cocker that a new fine arts building be erected. The Director at the time, Mr. A.J.C. ‘Archie’ Fisher, suggested a new three-story steel frame building for the current Whitaker Place site. It eventually opened in 1962. However, with “limited studio space and facilities, the School outgrew its available space in only three years” (Franks, 1984, p. 45). Once again, the buildings issue was attended to with pachydermous pace, further reinforcing cantankerous factionalism.

The Department of Railways vacated the old Mansion Hotel in Whitaker Place in 1967. It was eventually purchased by the University in the early 1970s and allocated to two departments. The Department of Architecture was given the ‘Brick Mansion,’

Fine Arts the ‘Wooden Mansion’. The Brick Mansion too, came to Fine Arts in 1979, and, after a stout campaign, was refurbished in 1981. Like the steel frame building and other ‘temporary’ accommodation, the Mansions have since gradually acquired what might at best be described as an air of romantic dilapidation.

When the numbers of students surged again in the early 1990s, due to a decision to double the intake, rented properties were acquired in haste by the University. Although approval had been given to demolish the steel frame building, this approval was withdrawn a fortnight before the bulldozers were to move in. The University’s financial situation had worsened again. It was also decided to retain the Wooden and Brick Mansions, although they soon proved inadequate given the growing numbers. The need for a new four-storey building was finally agreed in 1994, built in 1995 alongside the steel frame building, and occupied in 1996. It has, however, proved impossible to move out of the Mansions. In 1991 Elam declined, and has resisted a number of times since, the offer of new facilities on the Tamaki Campus. The Hames Sharley International (1993) plan to replace the steel-frame building, with a multi-layered and comprehensive set of facilities that would step up the hill to a Symonds Street frontage, was then, and still is, regarded as being beyond the financial reach of the University.

While environment is not all, and many of Elam’s facilities today are world class, this saga concerning buildings over many decades has often been taken within the School to imply that the University has been unsure about investing in Elam. This embedded a collective sense of this institutional doubt in Elam’s culture, with dual effects; it intensified resource and status politics, and it kindled an ethic of fractious excellence in adversity. Every achievement, and there have been many, have been so much the sweeter for the shared perception of externally contrived and sustained affliction. Similar patterns are evident in the changes to Elam’s standing and curriculum provisions over the decades.

Organisation

As noted above, Elam started in 1889 as a ‘special secondary school’ for poor primary and secondary students. They received five years teaching in the visual arts and in a limited range of general education subjects. The Elam bequest gradually lost its value. Financial difficulties in 1920 prompted the Elam Board to have the school taken over by the Auckland Education Board. From 1921 it was managed, staffed, maintained and inspected as a ‘Technical School’ under Board regulations. Its ‘instructors’ were appointed and paid as technical school teachers until its incorporation into the University in 1950 (Parton, 1979, p. 139). It will be shown below that the relationship between the Board and the Director after 1924 drifted into a hostile standoff. And as

the Director of Education (Beeby, 1945) confirmed, this was the period when the inherited English Art School model, which gives separate disciplinary status to each medium, was significantly reinforced. The artificial boundaries involved persist as structures in Elam's curriculum today and help explain differences between its various disciplinary subcultures and their plural assumptions about the nature of valuable knowledge (Dadson, 1997). This can not count as anarchic.

In 1926 the University of New Zealand introduced a Diploma of Fine Arts, and like all other Schools of Art, Elam joined the scramble for recognition. Negotiations started immediately between Elam, the University of Auckland, and a strong local Arts lobby group, the Auckland Society of Arts. The new regulations specified preliminary and final examinations in the fields of drawing, painting, modelling and design, and required a three-year course at a 'recognised' School of Fine Arts. However, while the Senate recognised the Canterbury School of Art in 1927, it ruled in 1928 that it would only accept applications from additional schools made through the Colleges that then constituted the University of New Zealand. This ruling blocked university recognition of Elam until 1950, to intense chagrin. And by 1945, the relationship between Elam and the Auckland Society of Arts had deteriorated into public sniping, essentially over how the Arts should adopt a post-colonial role (Gross, 1945; Sewell, 1945; Fairburn, 1945). Antagonistic external relations tended to become the norm.

Elam was defined by the University, from 1950, as a 'Special School.' It offered the three-year diploma and students could no longer enrol directly from primary school. Students had to be 16 years old with three years of secondary education and successful in the Preliminary Examination.

The 'new' Elam School of Fine Arts got off to shaky start. The abolition of interim bursaries in 1953 and poor job prospects saw enrolments collapse, triggering competition, and perhaps inevitably, self doubt and conservatism among the staff. Elam's teaching methods became increasingly dogmatic. "The students were dictated to rather than encouraged to pursue their own individual creativity" (Franks, 1984, p. 38). The 1950s was judged to be "a time of stagnation and tentative development" ... "and the Elam school became known as the 'drain-pipe' school" (p. 39) after the tubular motif preferred by Fisher and seen in its drawings.

The 1960s were quite the converse, and yet served to deepen the divisions and to encourage the growth of self-managing teams and individualistic virtue ethics. Elam became the centre of a great deal of creative and exuberant artistic and political activity. Intense polemics, experimental curriculum and innovative teaching methods were characteristic of this era. A number of long serving staff retired, some early and disaffected. A few sensational events, however, led to myths about an anarchic culture

that have tended to over-emphasise the conflict between people rather than the vigorous contestation of ideas. For example, it was the physical rather than intellectual aspects that were widely reported when lecturer Kurt von Meier was “so forceful in his promotion of ‘modern art’ and its strengths, and his denigration of academically-inspired art, that at the end-of-year grading session at the school, he and ‘Mac’ McLaren ended the day in physical confrontation” (Franks, 1984, p. 47).

The contestation over ideas was magnified by the section-based approach to curriculum development used, to the extent of seriously concerning the students. The new Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) introduced in 1967 aroused their ire. They attacked the need to specialise after one year into Design or Sculpture or Painting. They resented these three main sections “competing between themselves over top students, funds and resources. The School was not working cohesively or collectively” (Franks, 1984, p. 60).

While the University finally responded in 1973, by changing the leadership of the School, it left the fundamental organisational structure unchallenged, as it has since, allowing plural cultures to flourish. Today, like most other academic staff in the University, Elam staff identify firstly with their ‘discipline’ within Art, some even referring to their section as a ‘Department’, before then using ‘Elam’ and ‘the University’ as indicators of identity. Other relevant generative conditions can also be traced back decades to the link between the nature of leadership services and the organisational cultures they encouraged.

Leadership

The first director was Edward W. Payton (1859-1944), one of New Zealand’s earliest artist engravers, a painter and a photographer. His early drawings in the King Country suggest a sensitive, liberal and engaging person who enjoyed meeting people, and conversing in Maori. Turner (1997) found that his photographs from 1900-1940 consistently imply these personal qualities.

The context for his leadership of Elam was, however, set, respectively, by the Elam Board, and later, by the Board of Education’s Technical School regulations and inspection process. His leadership style appears to have changed over time, from authoritarian to *laissez faire*. Daly-Peoples (1990) noted that he was the sole teacher for the first ten years, and “ruled the school in a strict manner” (p. 2). He enforced the low income enrolment policy assiduously and dismissed several students in 1903 for “objectionable behaviour and being idle.” It is also recorded (p. 2) that “Payton’s insistence on standards and his belief in the importance of the art school led him into difficulties with staff, students and the arts community.” Towards the end of his

service, by then a sick man, he was said to have ruled with a light and indifferent touch. History has not been kind to him, probably unjustly so. For example, the most systematic history of Elam records off-handedly that

Payton ran the School in a curiously idle sort of way. It was packed with plaster casts that grew greyer and greyer with charcoal as the students made light and shade renderings (Franks, 1984, p. 10).

Payton also suffered by comparison. When ‘Archie’ Fisher was appointed Director in 1924 he was said to have “brought a degree of dynamism to the moribund school. Payton was 65 years old and unwell. Fisher was 28, handsome and dressed fashionably” (Daly-Peoples, 1990, p. 3). One of Fisher’s earliest decisions was, at the very least, a public relations coup; he “shocked some people by insisting on people drawing nude models instead of plaster statues” (Sinclair, 1983, p. 207).

Fisher was, by repute, one of the finest draughtsmen produced by the Royal College of Art for some years. His arrival at Elam was marked by the sudden departure of three lorry loads of old plaster casts and the artistic emphasis shifting to ‘three-dimensional constructional draughtsmanship’, which his critics later disparaged as his ‘drain-pipe’ motif. His leadership style was described as comprising “characteristic vitality, energy, and intellectual astuteness combined with his skills as a draughtsman and at political oration” (Franks, 1984, p. 26). It was also characteristically authoritarian and intolerant of criticism from any quarter, including from the Board’s inspectorate. There is evidence to suggest that his manner was resented and his motives were doubted, over decades. For example,

The Old Grammar School building ... had previously been considered for the site of the Chair in Fine Arts within the University. In 1928 the Auckland Society of Arts had decided to donate £5000 towards the cost of a new Art School and £1000 to a new Chair. The University refused on the grounds that it did not wish to have the Society of Arts represented on the administration of the centre. The money would have been given as an unconditional gift. No agreement was reached and Fisher had to struggle on for another 20 years to see his dream of amalgamation with the University realised (Daly-Peoples, 1990, p. 4).

Fisher’s authority and authoritarianism were apparently unaffected when the School joined the University in 1950. His attempts to dictate teaching methods continued to generate friction. His handling of an advertised lectureship in the history and theory of fine arts the same year provides another interesting glimpse of his use of power. Miss Helen Knapp was a very highly qualified English applicant. Another was “Fisher’s close friend, A.R.D. Fairburn, one of New Zealand’s leading poets and a

remarkable character, whose qualifications in art history were, however, obscure” (Sinclair, 1983, p. 207). Fairburn got the job. Various interpretations seem reasonable. One is that, like Sewell and Fairburn, as noted above, Fisher was one of many keen to establish a New Zealand identity in the Arts. Another is that Fisher’s evaluation of Knapp exhibited blatant sexism, ageism, xenophobia (from an Englishman) and partial relevance. Indeed, as Sinclair records (p. 208),

Fairburn himself had no great hopes that a local applicant would be appointed. He wrote a letter to a friend, “I told you I applied for the art lectureship. The appointment has not yet been made, but a decision will probably come out of the Council meeting on Monday. There’s been a good deal of gritty going. If I were to go abroad, drink steadily for twelve months, buy a black homburg and big pile of coloured postcards of the Masters, and come back again, I should no doubt be considered a gift from Heaven to the art school.

Fisher died suddenly in November 1959, and a generous aspect of the man was revealed. He bequeathed the ‘Fisher Lodge’ at Huia to Elam students in perpetuity. John Kavanagh, a sculptor, then acted as Head until 1961, when J. Paul Beadle was appointed Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts. Elam was actually awarded its first chair in fine arts in 1960, and although Paul Beadle was appointed in 1961, he did not take up then post until 1962.

Beadle was a medallist and bronze sculptor. Although a highly experienced art administrator, he used a non-directive leadership style. His period as Dean was marked by rapid and staff-driven changes to the curriculum and course structures, and the growth in full-time rather than part-time students and professional staff. These changes were patently driven by (and further reinforced) self-management, individualism and virtue ethics. While Beadle was a gentle liberal humanist, he did not deal with the baronial warfare that his style soon precipitated. To explain, strong personalities, particularly those in sculpture and photography, freely concede today that they campaigned to alter the distribution of resources. And they also recall a few spectacular incidents that added to the myth of wacky self-indulgence and anarchy by then publicly associated with Elam. Daly-Peoples (1990, p. 7) explained:

The 1960s was a time of the drug culture, with Elam students to the fore. Elam parties, which had always been famous, became notorious with all-night parties held in the studios. On one occasion there was even a fire lit by revellers. It was a difficult time for the administration. The creative freedom and lack of intervention by Beadle was not helpful for student development but it had allowed for the establishment of a less directive teaching approach.

The rumblings at institutional level grew steadily. A Sub Committee of the University Academic Committee voiced criticism of Beadle's leadership style in 1973. In 1974, at the University Open Day, Beadle's uncompromising defence of absolute artistic freedom again triggered controversy. An exhibition of large rubber phalluses, that proved extremely offensive to one member of the public, made the national news. When added to students angrily questioning curriculum structures, art politics dominating art teaching, intense resource competition between the largely self-directing sections, and unremitting competition over accommodation and recognition, Beadle despaired and withdrew from leadership roles in 1975. He was given a personal chair in 1977 and retired when 65 in 1982.

Jolyon D. Saunders was appointed Acting Head in 1975. Earlier he had been brought back from teaching in Illinois to lead the design group. He was a designer of domestic tools and facilities. As Acting Head he was expected by the University to act as a neutral manager, and then, from 1977, to serve as Professor and Dean. Simpson (1997) recalled that, at the outset, he ruled with the help of a small team, until pressure for wider consultation mounted. Saunders then established an Executive Committee of Arts to coordinate the Faculty. It comprised the heads of each section, initially excluded Photography until it forced admission (Turner, 1997), and later opened up to staff participation, for a period. Saunders used consensus and systematic delegation to make and implement decisions. This effectively avoided challenging the power, and thus the subcultures, of each of the self-managing sections (Dadson, 1997). Apart from this, Saunders tended to keep a low profile. Some of the art world never met him.

Under his leadership Elam appeared to mark time with little growth and a growing inwardness. And, as Simpson (1997) put it, "in the final stages this [Executive] committee was dismantled when the legitimacy of his leadership collapsed." The general perception was that Elam had stopped developing. Franks (1984, p. 69), for example, opined that

Counter-balancing the anarchic developments of the previous developments of the previous decade, Elam is sliding into a realm of conservatism that, if not checked, could well lead to the type of stagnation that plagued the school in the nineteen-fifties.

What most histories have failed to record is that Elam staff provided many forms of leadership during this period. At Simpson's suggestion (1997), Saunders introduced a 8.45 am 'Whip Around' meeting of staff, to improve attendance on Monday mornings. Turner (1997) and Woods then organised a series of strategic planning initiatives. Issues considered included assessment, theory versus skills, and the use of space. On the 7th of August, 1984, they facilitated an 'Informal Meeting of All Elam

Staff to Discuss their Ideas for the Growth and Development of the School'. Their inclusionary approach over the next year helped Elam develop shared goals, such as the need for the Gallery, break down some of the sectionalism, and culminated in a general desire to respond to the needs of Maori, Islander and feminist communities. The two-day Visual Arts Education Symposium 30 August - 1 September, 1985, on the Hone Waititi Marae, provided supportive criticism, strongly affirmed the public standing of Elam, and triggered a number of initiatives, such as the acquisition of a new Heidelberg KORD Press.

As the 1980s wore on, Saunders became aware of the need for internal change and the increasingly hostile external environment. In 1989 he organised an internal review using a consultant from the Higher Education Research Unit of the University. Opinions in Elam today concerning his motives and the actual outcomes achieved vary widely. Some interpreted the processes as a sham, others that it was an unsuccessful attempt to forestall University intervention. Some saw the only tangible outcome being a new coffee machine for the staffroom. Still others recalled an improvement to internal communications and levels of trust, a further breakdown of internal resistance to Maori and Islander Art, and a more coherent School view being put to the University; that it was eminently worthy of investment.

Saunders's (1990) last recorded word, in a piece largely ghostwritten by Turner (1997), reiterated that

the School faces an unprecedented demand for art education, not in a time of growth and optimism, but during a time of severe cutbacks and crippling fee increases ... in 1989 there were over 330 applicants for only 40 places in Elam's first year intake. Demand at another level has caused overcrowding and has restricted access to the most popular subjects ... The signs point to the need for expansion ... Without expansion how can we possibly serve the huge number of students taking sixth or seventh form art? How can the needs of Maori students be adequately met without Maori staff? There is also a pressing need to expand opportunities in the high-tech areas of film, video and computers. Expanded art history and complementary multi-disciplinary options must be considered (p. i).

Doubts continued to culminate, however, and in 1990, at the instigation of the Vice Chancellor, the Academic Committee of the University appointed a Review Committee to evaluate the purposes, programmes, structures and resources of Elam.

University Intervention

The 1991 'Tarling Report' (University of Auckland, 1991) recommended that the University raise the external responsiveness of the School, double its size from 1992 on the Whitaker site, add another 3-4 storey building and "rid the wooden mansions of animal pests" (p. 9). Extensive curriculum development was also recommended; retain existing subjects (Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Printmaking, Graphic Design and a more broadly defined Intermedia), introduce Maori and Pacific Art, rationalise Design in consultation with Architecture Property and Planning, increase student access to Art History, replace Studio Theory papers, limit the development of cinematic film, lower the degree of specialisation from second year, raise preparation for professional practice, rationalise art teacher education in consultation with the Auckland College of Education, permit cross crediting, and plan the development of a graduate school. It was also recommended that staff set objectives for their courses, use criteria approved by Senate (Deans' Committee) for assessment and make them available to students, provide descriptive feedback to students in addition to marks or grades, and develop a student handbook.

The Review noted rather pointedly that implementation of the proposed changes "will need enthusiastic cooperation from staff and other parts of the University. It will also need convinced, dedicated and energetic leadership" (p. 21). The Review acknowledged that Professor Saunders' "modesty and courtesy and his capacity to listen have helped produce an ambience of friendly collaboration and a caring atmosphere" (p. 21). It also recommended that an additional chair be advertised "with the rider that the person appointed would become Dean and Head of School for an initial period of five years" (p. 22). The tasks for the new Dean were clarified; reduce sectionalisation, establish an effective staff/ student consultative process, build links across the University, develop a staffing plan with balance, gender equity and supportive arrangements, boost research, and review resource use.

Professor Michael Dunn was appointed in 1994, having been asked by the Vice Chancellor, Colin Maiden, to apply. Dunn had acquired a reputation as something of a reformer in the Department of Art History in the Faculty of Arts. Maiden indicated the findings of the Review and the need for a fresh direction and greater academic accountability.

Dunn set priorities. The first, to give Maori Art (Te Toi Hou) refurbished facilities, was achieved despite some problems. The Masters of Fine Arts Programme was distinguished more from the BFA, given some dedicated staff and a more rigorous exposure to theory. A colleague was enticed from Art History to provide specialist teaching in theory (Shand, 1997). Staff turnover was used to convert tenured positions to short-term contracted tutorships achieving an improved age and gender balance. Semesterisation led to a review of in-house papers and identified some that "tended to be light on curriculum structure and directed learning." In search of economies the

printing press went to the Auckland Institute of Technology, and the printing press research unit, the foundry and the glass workshop were closed. A doctorate of Fine Arts, the DocFA, was introduced, the first in New Zealand, with the first enrollees starting in 1997. And the struggle over buildings was resumed.

In more recent years, external political environment has exerted pressures that have added to the internal challenges. Aggressive competitors in the Auckland region and elsewhere developed rapidly, while Elam failed to attract comparative levels of institutional investment. A major reason was the persistence of the myth that Elam was still an ‘organised anarchy’ and unable to develop a clear view of its future and make collective commitments. As shown in a following paper, this dangerous myth that was largely destroyed by introducing corporate strategic planning in the 1997 budget round for 1998.

Analysis and Closing Note

Historical conditions, events and initiatives concerning buildings, curriculum, leadership and context helped manufacture a myth of organisational anarchy. On the surface, Elam appeared to exhibit all of the characteristics of Cohen and Marsh’s organised anarchy. It seemed to be uncertain about its ends, using low technology in its teaching, with fluid participation in its governance. Under the surface, however, the evidence is more complex and tends to refute Cohen and Marsh’s theory.

The evidence is that Dunn (1997) encountered the “enormous difficulty” Elam had when trying to make decisions when “conflicting stories” undercut the possibility of agreement. High levels of values dissonance and decisional incapacity were confirmed by the University Registrar (Nicoll (1997), who added that it would be “nothing short of a minor miracle if they all faced in the same direction.” But this is not necessarily anarchy.

After a few attempts to prepare such a document, Dunn realised that any ‘Dean’s Vision’ for Elam would be contested as invalid. And yet, while acknowledging their reputation for idiosyncrasy and individualism, qualities “often expressed with unrestrained determination”, he was able to look through their history and discern “an unusual depth of professional commitment and dedication to the discipline that should be tapped into.” Thus he set out to challenge the myth of anarchy. After extensive consultations in Elam, with “absolutely no idea about what the outcomes might be,” he decided to “offer a process for collective thinking” in order to prepare the budget bid for 1998.

This decision was not reached overnight, and it was not as wildly optimistic as might be supposed. As a number of Elam staff (eg. Brennan, 1997; Fairclough, 1997; Keefe, 1997; Sumich, 1997) have pointed out, there have been many examples over time of collaborative planning across disciplines and between staff and students. Dunn (1997) also knew early that he had inherited, and simply had to endure, anger against leadership from earlier eras. Hence, as he put it, by “forcing all controversial issues onto open Department meeting agendas” and passing regular trials of his “patience, fairness and reliability” he felt that he had gradually achieved an “uneasy peace.” On the other hand, he found himself becoming increasingly impatient with what he described as “the tedious litanies of Jeremiahs who could see no prospect of progress in Elam”. And rather than give ground to partisan interests, he decided to provide determined academic leadership:

I want to build on these fresh holistic views of what Elam’s on about, to keep people working together and respecting administration as a part of the team effort. I am tired of the 20 years of ‘them and us’ adversarial relationships. Heads of sections will need support to help carry this through. Students are demanding staff accountability, value for money, proper staff availability, staff regularly giving attention and advice, and that section leaders sort out the absence of staff scheduled to teach.

While the details of the planning processes will be made available in a following paper, Dunn was able to submit the School budget bid for 1998 by mid 1997. He was also in a position to attach a freshly agreed collective mission statement for Elam, with goals and objectives, as well as all section’s program plans and their proposed program budgets. The rigor of the bid was greeted with some surprise by the University Budget Committee, and proved modestly successful in a very difficult situation. And in early 1998, Elam was invited by the University to plan and manage targeted expansion. The myth of anarchy had lost potency.

In sum, this brief historical and cultural case study of a university group, once publicly famous in New Zealand for their ‘organised anarchy’, reached conclusions at odds with Cohen and March’s theory. Apart from the evidence offered, another basic reason for refuting their theory of university organisation relates to the epistemological limits of their research. Their MBO analysis failed to trace the values embedded in objectives or the relativity of the culture that sustains such objectives in organisations. In Elam, the myth of anarchy prospered only so long as interpersonal dynamics and subcultural politics were confused with the academic contestation of ideas, and while the presence of a strong community virtue ethic that values pluralism, independence and aesthetic excellence remained shrouded and undeveloped.

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Author Note

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