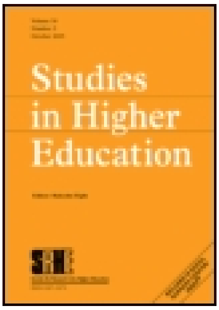

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Compliance or pragmatism: how do academics deal with managerialism in higher education? A comparative study in three countries

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Compliance or pragmatism: how do academics deal with managerialism in higher education? A comparative study in three countries

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Universities throughout Europe have adopted organisational strategies, structures, technologies, management instruments and values that are commonly found in the private sector. While these alleged managerial measures may be considered useful, and have a positive effect on the quality of teaching and research, there is also evidence of detrimental effects on primary tasks. The consequences of such managerial measures were investigated through 48 interviews with staff members at 10 universities in the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. The results were analysed and interpreted within the framework of institutional and professional theory, by linking them to three central themes: 'symbolic compliance', 'professional pragmatism' and 'formal instrumentality'. These themes explain why and how the respondents dissociated themselves from the managerial measures imposed upon them. This occurred often for pragmatic and occasionally for principled reasons.

Keywords: comparative research; higher education; institutionalism; managerialism; performance management

Introduction

It seems that universities are 'no longer viewed as ivory towers of intellectual pursuits and truthful thoughts, but rather as enterprises driven by arrogant individuals out to capture as much money and influence as possible' (Powell and Owen-Smith 1998, 267). As a consequence of socio-economic and political developments, such as budget constraints, accountability for quality, 'massification' and decentralisation (Bryson 2004), universities throughout Europe have adopted organisational strategies, structures, technologies, management instruments and values that are commonly found in the private sector (Aucoin 1990; Deem 1998). This trend of public organisations copying techniques from the private sector is 'one of the earliest features of New Public Management, and remains one of the most enduring' (Boyne 2002, 97), and may even go further back than the actual term 'managerialism' (Hood 1991, 1995; Pollitt 1993). In line with the study of Germany by Schimanke and Lange (2009), we consider here the Bologna process as an additional legitimation for state governments to impose managerial measures on the higher education system.

The impact of the Bologna process is increasingly visible; it has been translated into policy concepts and has gradually penetrated from the international to the

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national, university, faculty and departmental levels of current higher education institutions in Europe. As this increased impact on current higher education affairs coincides with more discussion and criticism (Huisman 2009; Neave and Amaral 2008, Teelken and Wihlborg 2010; Waks 2007), it is now time to investigate the impact of such managerial measures on individual employees in universities.

Managerialism by itself is difficult to define, because it has different meanings to different authors. Table 1 provides the main features in a brief comparison. All five sources mention structural or organisational change, and emphasise the ostensible 'private sector' features which are entering the public sector. It seems as if a new language, in terms of practices, values and norms, is of increased importance in the public sector. Deem (1998) particularly mentions efficiency, effectiveness and excellence, while Hood (1995) refers to more explicit standards of performance, and Hackett (1990) worries about the 'disproportionate growth' of administration.

A more nuanced conceptualisation of managerialism has gradually replaced the former polarised vision, as propagated by, for example, Harvey and Lee (1997) and more recently by Deem, Hillyard, and Reed (2007), who consider the implementation of managerialism as a substantial transformation for academics. Harvey and Lee (1997, 1431) argue that institutionalised peer reviews carried out, for example, through the research assessment exercise can be seen as part of a general trend towards managerialism, and that 'the existence of a list of core journals which are believed to count most in the ranking exercise' for UK universities poses a serious threat to 'academic freedom and the diversity within the profession'. An example of such a list is the 'Diamond List' of 27 economics journals, later extended with 20 more economics and multidisciplinary titles. Despite denials that any formal list was used in the assessment exercises of 1989 or 1992, Harvey and Lee (1997) confirmed the convention of such a widely-shared list of high-ranking journals.

Deem, Hillyard, and Reed (2007) investigated how a growing 'target culture' changed the work of academics, as universities have transformed from 'communities of scholars' to 'workplaces'. In other recent publications, a more subtle approach to managerialism has been suggested by Costea, Crump, and Amiridis (2008, 661), who argue that managerial concepts possess a 'certain cultural coherence', which should be considered within a broader historical-cultural context, and not as aliens to the academic culture. We perceive 'managerialism' in this article as both the *ideologies* about the application as well as the *actual use* of techniques, values and practices that are derived from the private sector (Deem 2001).

Chan (2001, 109) suggested that '"some dose" of "managerialism" in the right proportion and in the right context' may be useful in universities, and that it positively affects the quality of job performances. Transparency and accountability can help institutions to improve the quality of their teaching and research, for example through discussing strengths and weaknesses among colleagues.

This implication is challenged by others who argue that managerialism works against its own intentions of efficient and effective quality improvement (Bryson 2004; Davies and Thomas 2002; Thornhill, Lewis, and Saunders 1996; Trow 1994). Bryson (2004, 192), for example, explains that university employees 'no longer enjoy any part of the job, apart from the vacations', because the increased business-oriented administrative tasks and assessments have caused them to spend more time on such secondary activities. In addition, employees adapt their activities to 'the simplifying tendencies of the quantification of outputs' (Trow 1994, 11). This so-called increased objectivity through the quantification of outcomes is consistent with an instrumentalist

Table 1. Various descriptions of managerialism.

Pollit and Bouckaert (2000, 2004)	Deem (1998)	Maor (1999)	Hood (1995)	Hackett (1990)
deliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organisations with the objective of getting them (in some sense) to run better a. structural change b. process change c. management reform	the adoption by public sector organisations of organisational forms, technologies, management practices and values more commonly found in the private business sector a. efficiency b. effectiveness c. excellence	unlike the traditional language of public administration, which emphasizes stability, rules and responsiveness to the law, the vocabulary accentuates: a. change b. decentralization c. responsiveness to consumers d. performance e. need to 'earn' rather than to 'spend'	a. greater disaggregation of public organisations b. greater competition c. greater use within the public sector of management practices which are broadly drawn from the private corporate sector d. greater stress on discipline and parsimony in resource use e. more hands-on management f. more explicit and measurable standards of performance and g. attempts to control according to pre-set output measures	1. changes in the social organisation of academic work: a. new structures b. new roles c. new processes 2. the basic values and norms are changed a. increased accountability for time and resources b. formal strategic planning c. professional lobbying d. disproportionate growth of the administrative component with the attendant adoption of managerial standards and principles

perspective on the functioning of higher education organisations (Barnetson and Cutright 2000).

The purpose of this article is, first, to investigate how managerialism, as perceived by members of university staff, affects teaching and research in higher education, and, second, how the reactions of the respondents can be interpreted within the framework of institutional and professional theory. We will provide a brief description of the situation in higher education before presenting the results of this investigation.

Developments in higher education

The higher education systems in the three countries studied – the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK – can be characterised by their high status and long history, with the University of Oxford dating back to 1167, Uppsala to 1477 and Leiden to 1575. While the Netherlands and Sweden have a binary system of higher education, distinguishing between university and higher professional education, in the UK this distinction is more subtle, with higher status and lower status institutions (Eurydice 2010).

Universities are increasingly being held accountable for the quality of their performance, due to the influences of new public management and managerialism (Deem 1998; Roberts 2001) and, consequently, have to control and improve the quality of their output (Deem 1998, 2001; Halsey 1995; Politt and Bouckaert 2000). Various authors (Barry, Chandler, and Clark 2001; Hood 1995; Maassen 2000; Parker and Jary 1995; Sizer and Cannon 1999) agree that there is a greater need for measurement of performances in higher education organisations, a development that goes back much further than Bologna. Since the signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999 by 29 countries, including the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, European universities have committed themselves to achieve comparability in systems of quality care, which should result in a European accreditation system.

The main measures related to the Bologna process involve the implementation of the three-cycle degree system (bachelor's, master's and PhD), more uniform quality assurance and an international recognition of degrees through the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System). The progress of the Bologna process thus far has been successful (Bologna Follow-up Group 2007), at least on paper. Some challenges remain, such as the development of national frameworks of qualifications and international participation in quality assurance. The Bologna follow-up shows that, in the Netherlands, a national qualifications framework for higher education has been drafted, and will be discussed widely with external peers. Current developments in Dutch higher education can be characterised by more emphasis on quality care (e.g. Dutch universities can apply for the ECTS), a stronger output-oriented financial structure and the implementation of the new accreditation system. Sweden has adopted a new law, as of February 2006, to reform the higher education system in line with the Bologna process. This involves, among other measures, developing degrees and courses in line with the three-cycle system, introducing a new two-year master's degree in the second cycle and reforming the credit system in line with ECTS. All students in Swedish higher education have been enrolled in the three-cycle degree system since July 2007. In the UK the implementation of ECTS is being undertaken alongside the credit framework developed for England, while Northern Ireland and Wales already have credit systems in operation. Many British institutions use ECTS, primarily within European programmes, but this is not compulsory. The UK, in particular, could be considered a role model, with many of the major Bologna measures already in place (Bologna Follow-up Group 2007).

In contrast to the Bologna Follow-up Group, Huisman (2009) and Neave and Amaral (2008) argued that the implementation did not go as straightforwardly as originally expected. The outcomes of the Bologna process (so far) can be briefly summarised as convergence at a macro level, coinciding with greater diversity at a micro level. We see more unification regarding structural elements such as the ECTS, diploma supplements and quality assurance regimes.

Diploma supplements have been introduced as an extra element to the bachelor's or master's degree for graduating students, in order to encourage international mobility and comparability of degrees. According to the Trend Report 2010 (Sursock and Smidt 2010), 66% of higher education institutions issue such supplements to all students. However, this unification coincides with a greater variety at the department and course level, given the various stages of developments and different national interpretations. This has resulted in a varied pace and content of implementation, involving a 'highly complex cultural and social transformation' (Huisman 2009, 251). 'The devil is in the detail', as countries seem to have found 'specific national solutions to challenges of the Bologna agenda' (Huisman 2009, 252). For example, we see a variety in the lengths of bachelor's, master's and PhD cycles, in access criteria to the cycles, and in whether quality assurance aims at control or enhancement. Neave and Amaral (2008, 60) evaluated the Bologna process and concluded that 'The basic strategy itself needs to be rethought', and that it needs to change from a mobilising strategy, which has served its purpose thus far, to a strategy that ascertains, consolidates and communicates internal reform.

The higher education system in the UK consists of different categories of universities, which can be ranked in various manners (e.g. through the formation of groups of universities, such as the Russell and the 1994 groups), and these rankings can change every year. In Sweden and the Netherlands, the higher education systems are more 'egalitarian', although there is diversity and variation between universities, faculties and departments. The quality of Swedish higher education is generally believed to be high, with small differences between institutions (National Agency for Higher Education 2003). Swedish employees have to adapt to a new type of academic profession, their 'third task'. In so doing, they must take a more active role in society; in addition to research and teaching, they are increasingly expected to compete for research funding. The Dutch system is generally considered to be increasingly 'managerial' (Teelken 2008), which is illustrated by the rigid system of accreditation, involving a straightforward judgement (pass or fail), the production of annual reports and an emphasis on output (publications, graduated students).

Design and background of this study

The data presented in this article are part of a larger, European study on managerialism and organisational commitment. In an earlier phase, in order to investigate the impact of managerialism at universities, a questionnaire was completed in 18 universities within six European countries by 2325 respondents, amongst academic as well as support staff (Smeenk et al. 2006). To improve the comparability among faculties in terms of the primary process, we chose to focus on faculties of social sciences and economics/business studies, as they were most widely represented amongst these 18 universities. This comparability does not extend to the levels of managerialism, as these clearly differ between faculties and universities (e.g. Shattock 1999). The findings of this survey showed that there are many differences between countries and universities, which made the generalised results rather inconclusive. Because 'levels of managerialism' differ among countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004), universities (Ball 1990; Shattock 1999), faculties (Chan 2001; Trowler 1998) and even in the perception of individual employees (Davies 2007; Ylijoki 2003), the first study did not reveal a direct positive or negative effect of managerialism on organisational commitment. Since social interactions clearly have a positive effect on university employees' organisational commitment, it appears that collegiality and social contacts are core aspects of an academic institution, regardless of the level of managerialism. The nature of our survey did not do enough justice to the diversity between countries and universities. Several questions, particularly concerning the exact nature, direction and context of the relationship between managerialism and commitment remained unanswered (Smeenk et al. 2006).

We decided, therefore, to organise a second round of data collection, in order to investigate which effects of managerialism the respondents experienced in their daily work in higher education, and how they coped with these managerial changes. In the summer of 2007 in the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, interviews were carried out with employees (mainly academic staff) within the same universities as in the previous phase. The respondents were asked to focus on the last three to five years, meaning that the findings cover a period from approximately 2002 or 2004 to 2007. To ensure comparability, interviews were carried out by means of a topic list, and were audio taped and transcribed fully. The texts were analysed with the help of Kwalitan, a software application particularly designed for investigating interview data. The data from this second phase are reported in this article.

We interviewed 17 women and 31 men (48 interviews in total) who held positions as administrative officers, PhD students, lecturers, senior lecturers, (assistant and associate) professors, (associate) deans and vice-chancellors. Most respondents worked (more than) full-time and had a permanent contract. The age of the respondents varied between 28 and 67 years. Table 2 provides an overview of the interviews conducted. In order to distinguish the various respondents and provide some background on their situation, we used codes and we have included their gender, profession and age.

As indicated in the following section, the respondents experienced a variety of changes in research as well as teaching. The findings will be presented in two stages. First, how did the respondents perceive managerial changes in universities, and were these considered to have a positive or a negative effect on the quality of research and teaching? Second, to what extent can the perceived changes be explained on the basis of theoretical concepts?

Theoretical framework: interpreting the findings

As we have argued elsewhere (Teelken 2008), the implementation of performance measurement, which should be viewed as a specific manifestation of managerialism, can be conceptualised and explained on the basis of two different theories: institutional theory and professional theory.

Institutional theory can provide relevant explanatory value concerning the relationships between the (institutional) environment of organisations, the actual organisations themselves and the employees within these organisations. We use institutional theory to explain the inertia shown by higher education organisations and, more particularly, by the (professional) employees against the managerial measures

Table 2. Overview of interviews.

Country	University	Faculty	Number of interviews and codes used
The Netherlands			
	Amsterdam	Social and Behavioural Sciences	5 (Nl1a – e)
	VU University Amsterdam	Economics Sciences, Social Sciences	4 (Nl2a – d)
	Groningen	Management Sciences, Social sciences	4 (Nl3a – d)
Sweden			
	Gothenburg	Sociology Pedagogy	6 (S1a – g)
	Uppsala	Educational and Economic Sciences	6 (S2a – e)
	Växjö	Social Science Department	6 (S3a – f)
UK			
	Cardiff	Cardiff Business School	6 (UK1a-d, UK2a, b)
	East Anglia	Norwich Business School	6 (UK3a-f)
	Edinburgh	Department of Education	5 (UK4a-e)

imposed upon them. Institutionalism is a remarkable theme, as it seems more likely to explain inertia than change (e.g. Greenwood and Hinings 1996). Since 'neo-institutionalism emphasises the homogeneity of organisations, it also tends to stress the stability of the institutionalized components' (Powell and Dimaggio 1991, 14). As we argued elsewhere (Teelken 2008), institutionalism helps to explain why and how organisational structures are determined, not only by their day-to-day activities, but also through their more extensive, institutional environment. The impact of this institutional environment results in 'ceremonial assessment criteria'. 'Myths are here an alternative source of formal structure' (Meyer and Rowan 1983, 22), leading to isomorphism with institutional rules.

This implies that, if organisations are difficult to assess (such as universities often are), isomorphism with other institutions or conformity with the institutional rules is more important for organisational success than the day-to-day activities such as teaching and research. For example, in the Dutch situation, successfulness in the accreditation process is determined much more by the conformation to institutional rules than by the actual quality of teaching. Whether the self-evaluation reports conform to the formal rules is more essential for obtaining accreditation than the actual quality of teaching. The question of how systematically the assessment of students is organised and evaluated is more important than how much students actually learn and whether their knowledge is relevant.

On the basis of institutional theory, the narrowing understanding of performance in the public sector can be considered as a stereotypical power struggle between the emerging managerial and the old professional elite (Brignall and Modell 2000). Perceiving individual behaviour through an 'institutional' perspective remains an under-researched area. One of the few studies in this area has been carried out by Hallett (2010), who shows that 'institutional myths' and 'organisational practices' in secondary education, which were once uncoupled, are again tightly linked in times of turmoil.

We are interested in the stabilising forces of institutionalism, as they present a helpful structure to explain the lack of change in public sector organisations. Oliver (1991) demonstrated that organisations do not invariably conform to their institutional environment, as it can threaten the long-run survival of organisations. Resistant strategies can sometimes be potentially effective. It is, therefore, relevant to investigate the range of responses available to organisations instead of just assuming *passive conformity* or *strategic noncompliance* (Oliver 1991, 175), which we observed in the empirical research.

While institutional theory provides the broader framework, it is within the organisations that professional theory offers additional explanatory value for the way the individual respondents deal with changes, broadening the scope of institutional theory. We use professional theory here to explain the tensions professionals feel due to the managerial measures imposed upon them. Managerialism seemed to overrule the professionals as public services moved towards systems of managed organisations (Shattock 1999; Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick, and Walker 2007). Professional organisations rely on the skills and knowledge of their operating professionals to function (Mintzberg 1983), because first- line professionals work more closely with their clients (patients, students) than with their colleagues and often feel most affiliation to their self-governing associations, which set their standards. Various authors (Chandler, Barry, and Clark 2002, Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd 2003), therefore, consider 'professionals' or 'professionalism' as a potential source of resistance to change at universities.

For the purpose of interpreting the findings we used three central concepts, which we have derived from the combination of institutional and professional theory, and previous empirical research in this field (Teelken 2008). These concepts are labelled *symbolic compliance, professional pragmatism* and *formal instrumentality*. The three labels roughly form a dimension of being 'loosely coupled' from quality assessment, by trying to keep managerialism at a distance, via a more pragmatic attitude by taking the developments for granted, towards completely embracing and accepting the managerial measures imposed upon the respondents. While symbolic compliance implies an attitude of 'critical resistance' and professional pragmatism a more realistic, down-to-earth approach, formal instrumentality shows the most positive point of view concerning managerial developments and lacks a critical perspective. These labels have proven successful in explaining the reactions of respondents in a longitudinal comparison between the Dutch higher education and health care sectors (Teelken 2008).

Symbolic compliance implies the pretension of enthusiasm, while remaining vague creates scope for autonomy or performing in your own way. Respondents will only react or adapt to changes at a superficial or cosmetic level, especially when traditional values are deeply embedded. It seems that academics continue to be loosely coupled from their organisations, while employees learned to deal with current developments. Being loosely coupled is particularly likely for measures that lie outside the primary process of academic activities, for example concerning quality care such as the accreditation scheme. Symbolic compliance refers to a combination of acquiescence and avoidance, as used by Oliver (1991) and Leisyte (2007).

As opposed to symbolic compliance, *professional pragmatism* refers to taking the developments for granted; respondents deal with the managerial measures in a critical but serious manner. The respondents consider themselves as acknowledged professionals, equipped with knowledge and experience but without too much detachment. *Formal instrumentality* involves the reliance on formal arrangements and instruments (such as the accreditation scheme or the quality care instruments) without a critical perspective.

Perceived changes

The respondents in the three countries agreed that in the last three to five years they have observed an increased emphasis on performance measurement, and more assessment of quality in research as well as teaching in universities. Particularly in Sweden and the Netherlands, the Bologna process played a considerable role, while in the UK, many of the managerial developments pre-dated the implementation of Bologna. All interviewees acknowledged that there are substantial changes taking place concerning these issues. However, these broad developments coincided with diversity between countries, universities and individual respondents. What we will show in the following subsections is that the respondents experienced quite considerable autonomy in some aspects of their work (e.g. the content of their research) in contrast with others, which were subject to increasing control from the university. The nature of this control is clearly linked to the 'managerial aspects' of research, such as quality checks through the measurement of performance, particularly through the research assessment exercise (UK), the financial aspects of research (Sweden) and the possibilities for sanctions (Netherlands).

Assessment of research

The respondents in the three countries studied agree that their research has become increasingly more closely assessed, particular through measurement of performance and the ranking of researchers. In Sweden, this assessment is relatively new and has had only a limited impact, but it is progressively meaningful in the Netherlands and has been fairly dramatic in Britain. The pressure involves emphasis on (numbers and nature of) publications, the necessity to obtain external research funding and the increased bureaucracy involved with such measures.

The assessment of research as a means of ranking is new in Sweden. One respondent stated:

> And then they [the assessment committee] actually ranked us, and said five is the best and one is the lowest or something like that. So we got a four and that's good. But … when you get ranked, you also start to compare yourself. What do the others get? What do the other groups get or the other departments of the university as a whole get? (S2b, woman, lecturer, 41)

The respondents consider these changes as quite a struggle:

> We are in the middle of a changing process. I'm willing to change. Of course I should be open to change, but, at the same time, I think I have quite a hard time with this, the way efficiency is running at the universities. It's getting much, much worse. From the government, there are quite a number of decisions that are being made, most recently this … internationalisation. There's a struggle beyond this Bologna process, to internationalise and standardise all of our courses to this new ECTS system of department systems. (S1d, woman, head of research, 45)

The Dutch respondents perceive the management of research as increasingly performance-oriented. The performance of researchers is mainly measured through counting numbers of publications. There are subtle differences between the universities and the research groups in the manner these publications are actually 'measured' and calculated, but particularly international publications in (high-ranking, especially American) ISI-rated journals are considered of great importance. While all respondents acknowledge that there are publication criteria, the norms are often unclear. Few respondents knew exactly what the criteria involved, especially if they personally did not have to worry about loss of research time.

In Britain, research assessment (particularly through the research assessment exercise) has been going on for 20 years, but it has gained more and more influence over the years: 'Yes, definitely I have seen that shift in six or seven years. They are trying to run universities more as a business, definitely' (UK3d, woman, senior lecturer, 39). Many aspects are being measured, both internally and externally. The academics in this study also found that there is a move towards more measurable standards of performance. They do not perceive assessment as undesirable in principle, but are critical about the manners and systems of performance measurement. As one respondent noted, 'There's a lot of discussion and dispute about how to measure. What are the best ways of measuring?' (UK3f, man, full professor, 64). A lecturer argued, 'I think that if you get the performance measures wrong, it can drive dysfunctional behaviour, and I am not sure that we have totally got the system right' (UK3d, woman, senior lecturer, 39). It was noted by another respondent that focusing solely on published journal papers 'is a very myopic way of doing things' (UK1b, man, lecturer, late 50s).

The two following quotes confirm the perceived disadvantages of the research assessment exercise, and that the counting of publications and words prevails over the actual internal quality:

> The whole RAE, I think, is deeply flawed. To me what we are engaged in is changing hearts and minds, changing the world around us. And that means reaching lots of different audiences, and you keep lots of different sorts of outcome in lots of different forms. So, sometimes it's only a couple of thousand words for a website, sometimes a 65,000 or 80,000 word book. Sometimes it's a 40,000 word management report that you can buy for £1000. Sometimes it's an academic journal article, which is read by four people, and one of them is my mum. I mean you have all those different ways of reaching the world. And just to say: 'a measure of quality of research is that you've produced an article for the *Harvard Business Review*', I think that's nonsense. (UK1c, man, lecturer, 48)

> It is about how many things [journal papers] you get published, but that is not necessarily measuring the quality. When I think about the work in this department, which has been here for about 20 years, then I think that there have been reports and papers from here that have had an enormous influence across the world, globally, but there's no way that they can be picked up for the RAE, whereas the RAE may take up papers which are very poor in quality, maybe, so the idea of measuring the quality with that is not what you actually intend. (UK3e, woman, lecturer, late 50s)

If researchers do not publish enough or in the right media, they can usually expect sanctions. Swedish respondents seem not to be affected directly by sanctions on their research performance. Instead, a few respondents complained that they invested time in composing their publications lists and did not receive any feedback.

For Dutch respondents, these sanctions appear particularly in the form of reduction of research time, which has to be exchanged for more teaching. This often coincides with fewer possibilities for promotion. Extra publications can be rewarded with additional research time, with a maximum of 40–60% research time. Two of the Dutch respondents lost their research time since they have failed to publish in the last few years. The reasons they give for failing to meet the publication criteria are personal (Nl3b, woman, lecturer, late 40s) or the necessity to finish their PhD thesis (Nl3a, man, lecturer, late 40s). Both respondents take it quite stoically and have found ways to deal with it, e.g. through trying to regain the research time by publishing in their spare time:

> I'm really hoping to squeeze two more international publications out of my data in order to regain research time. But if this fails, I'm not going to be frustrated by the fact that I have no research time, as long as I can do my own things … I received a lot of comments when I did not publish, but when I presented my book on … about 90% of the criticisms became silent. (Nl3a)

In the UK, it is the research assessment exercise that puts a lot of pressure on individual members of academic staff to publish at least four 'eligible' papers in refereed top-level journals in a given time period: 'For the RAE, it can go to that they say, "Sorry you haven't got enough for the RAE". For an academic that tends to be a bit like blood on your CV' (UK1d, man, full professor, 58). The pressure that comes with the RAE should not be underestimated. A respondent pointed out:

> In that sense it is a punitive system. If you don't do well, that makes a hell of a lot of a difference. It is enormous. The universities and the faculties they must. They do not have a choice; they need to do well in the RAE. (UK3e, woman, lecturer, late 50s)

Therefore 'there's pressure on the publication of research and also where those publications have got to be' (UK2b, man, lecturer, 50).

It is not only important for the universities to get a good score in the research assessment exercise, but it also has a very significant impact on the individual employee. This coincides with government policy: 'It has been a clear government priority to concentrate research funding in a small number of institutions, so most of the money actually goes to four or five universities' and 'every time the RAE comes back they are trying to centralise that funding more and more' (UK3f, man, full professor, 64). The emphasis on performance has a direct impact on staff policies and increased instability, particularly for junior employees:

> The pressure in respect to that has grown. It is still pretty important, because if you don't play the game the university wants you to play, you don't get promoted. If you were a junior member of staff, and you started on a short-term contract for three years, and didn't do any research in those three years and didn't perform well, the contract wouldn't be renewed. And perhaps, if only marginally, maybe then another short-term contract would be given for three years. So they are monitoring you in that kind of way. The growth of short-term contracts in universities in employment terms is appalling. I don't like it. Being a union person you would like full-time contracts. It brings an enormous amount of uncertainty; whilst it is getting flexibility for the employer the reverse point is uncertainty in the individual field. (UK1b, man, lecturer, late 50s)

Another demand placed upon the respondents, next to the increased emphasis on publications, involves obtaining research funding from external sources. A major development in Sweden is that there is less funding available from the government, which automatically involves a greater reliance on external funding. Lecturers could buy themselves research time through the acquisition of external funding, e.g. from research foundations:

> Well, that is the message from the university top leadership, the rektor, that we need to try to get more external funding, because there is so little funding, relatively, from the government. There are, of course, different types of funds, as money comes from different

> areas. Some of them are high competition, some are actually put into some areas … from prioritised research areas, for specific subjects. And I think that most of them are going to medicine or natural sciences. Oh yeah, we have to write an application to get those fundings. Within social sciences and humanities, you have comparatively less money in Sweden than we have in natural sciences and medicine. (S3a, man, senior lecturer, 63)

A third development concerning the process of research assessment involves the growing bureaucracy that coincides with an increased emphasis on administration. This necessitates keeping more systematic records of publications in order to enable output measurements, with particular emphasis on international publications:

> I dislike the fact that there is more and more administrative work, more forms to fill out. A lot of time is spent trying to make, when you conclude projects you have to conclude the books when it comes to financing, you have to show you have done certain things you promised to do, whether it is publication or that you have seminars or whatever. And a lot of that is done by the researchers themselves and that takes a lot of time. Also, when it comes to teaching, there are a lot of things which the researchers or teachers have to do themselves when it comes to administration. (S1a, man, assistant professor, 31)

The bureaucracy involved with the collection of the publication records placed an encumbrance on the respondents. One PhD student explains:

> I have many colleagues who would prefer to resist the increased bureaucracy. I think it is because scientists are intractable, and social scientists are often left-winged and intractable, and they do not like bureaucracy and institutionalising and everything which scents after control, planning, transparency, figures, accountability. It is a culture which they dislike; they consider it as a 'weltanschauung' which they really reject politically. (Nl1d, man, PhD student, late 20s)

The British respondents complained about more bureaucracy when applying for research grants, because this involves a lot of form filling, that often has to go through the head of the research office. Similar procedures are to be followed when visiting conferences or charging expenses. It seems that the universities are only controlling (or managing) those aspects of the research that are relatively easy to measure, very often related to financial aspects.

While the respondents generally agreed on the changes concerning the process of research (through emphasis on performance), there was disagreement as to whether they experienced an impact on the *content* of their research. The British respondents felt that they had almost complete autonomy with regard to their research. One respondent describes it in this way:

> In my field I could research anything I like, and in my own time, but within the field I am specialising. I have got about three or four different projects on the road just now. They are all interesting, and I have chosen them all myself. (UK4e, man, senior lecturer, 58)

Most respondents concur that research activities are 'self-managed with some structural influences' (UK3c, man, full professor, 37). The reason for that is that there is 'a professional expectation that you can do research' (UK1d, man, full professor, 58).

However, it seems that increased control over the research process indirectly results in control over the content and methods of research. A Swedish respondent admits that a more managerial approach has at least an indirect effect on the content of research, implying that content and process are interrelated:

> Ideally, they should have their time to do research in the field that they take, but in reality, they are occupied with applying for grants for their doctoral students. So it is very … what they really do and to get money they must pursue their research in the direction where they can find money. So it is very much the funders who are, who give the possibility for what to do your research on … And it is also, of course, to get publications, you must conform to this and that forum, like a journal. I mean, this journal will just take this kind of things. So you can be a very good researcher without finding any possibilities to get your stuff published. (S1g, man, senior lecturer, 63)

A Swedish respondent explained that the changed manner of funding resulted in more 'specialty areas', a certain focus on what should and should not be investigated:

> What we can see is, of course, that from the faculty level the strategy discussions become more important, meaning that what are specialty areas. I mean, we are good at many things, but we can't be good at everything. So, maybe there is a focus of what areas we should promote towards non-academic work, where you should specialise in. (S1a, man, assistant professor, 31)

Another Swedish respondent adds to this: 'There has been a definite reduction in the plurality and diversity of research funds for different individuals' (S1d, man, head of research, 45). Relatively more money is going into the larger institutions, while individual researchers find it much harder to compete for funding. A Dutch respondent illustrates that outcomes seem to dominate the content of research:

> The 'business' is managed on the basis of medals and signs of honour, for the policy makers at least, because they want to score. But it is actually a perverse effect. They want to score and are not occupied with the content of research. (Nl1b, man, senior researcher, 50)

While some of the respondents find that publication criteria provide transparency and fairness, such as accountability, over allocated time, others worry that too much pressure will result in a deterioration of the quality of research. A Dutch respondent says:

> Research time is being used for writing publications, but it also leads to that research is getting scantier, leaner, a lot of conceptual papers. I have also written a conceptual paper; you just have to. I have no time to carry out research. And what you are doing, having this kind of interview, well, you have to organise it very well; other ways it will not work. You have indeed a problem, if you do not pay attention in autumn, and your research time has not been organised in spring, then you are without data in summer, and you just have to publish. I see it happening, people try all sorts of cunning manoeuvres, sometimes of the most perverse sort, until the moment you think, is this still academic? That is then an excrescence. (Nl2b, man, assistant professor, late 40s)

Still, some respondents are not affected by the managerial developments, and this often depends on their career stage:

> For me there is no pressure, I've been here quite a long time; I have my established line of research. People know it's a good line of research. They value what I'm doing, and, therefore, nobody is going to try to push me into something I don't want to do … There are research groups, and I think that where people are younger, there may be put a little pressure on them to contribute in that direction. (UK1b, man, lecturer, late 50s)

Assessment of teaching

The respondents in the three countries agree that a greater emphasis is being placed on quality care and quality assessment. According to the Swedish respondents there have been some changes in the last three to five years involving the quality of teaching. Most of the respondents indicated that they used evaluations to assess courses, and explained that these evaluations were used in an increasingly formalised and systematic way: 'It's a system for quality, very systematic, when we evaluate all the courses regularly' (S1f, senior administrator, man, 48).

Some respondents gave examples of evaluations at the university level. The universities in Sweden are evaluated by the National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket). This agency sends people to investigate the curriculum of the lecturers and to interview students and lecturers. After their evaluations are made, they give a verdict about the educational standards, and the outcomes are made public:

> In the fall we had a meeting with the dean of the social sciences faculty about our different methods of quality. We called it quality assurance, quality care, about standardising evaluations. We have at our department, we always had, I think it is the director of undergraduate studies, who takes a lot of initiative, would it be quality care. And it is not standardised. So it would be based on every lecturer. Every course has a course lecturer. Their responsibility is to take the evaluations. (S1d, man, head of research, 45)

A lot of the changes in teaching are due to the Bologna process. As one respondent, S2a (woman, lecturer, 40) said, 'I think it also has to do with the whole Bologna process; it has sort of spurred other changes in the education'.

The British respondents agreed that there is no doubt about the overall trend that universities are increasingly trying to monitor the quality of teaching. One respondent expressed the most commonly heard opinion, when he argued that quality care in teaching is more systematically evaluated:

> That sort of thing came into academia about 10 years ago now. And in that time I have seen things change. They are evaluating; they definitely are evaluating more than they did years ago, and more systematically than what they used to, from my experience, right? (UK2b, man, lecturer, 50)

Within the universities a range of methods is used for quality care of teaching, with some slight differences amongst them. To some extent the methods are imposed on the universities by outside bodies, but internally there is also a concern for the quality of teaching. The methods that are used to monitor the quality of teaching internally include staff meetings (or degree scheme meetings), questionnaires, student–staff liaison committees and peer reviews. The external methods consist of external reviews by official bodies in the various subject areas, and some initiatives to support lecturer training at the various institutions.

While the respondents agree that a greater emphasis has been placed on the assessment of teaching quality, they do not see a direct relation with the actual quality of teaching. Indeed, some respondents find that the quality of teaching has deteriorated.

In the Swedish system money is paid for every student who passes a course year. One respondent claimed that this diminishes the quality of education, because as a result of this system, in order to generate more funding, the examinations have become easier to pass. This also means that the lecturer has to work harder with students for whom they are not getting paid. One respondent remarked, 'They are already on their knees; it's insane. It's absolutely insane' (S1d, man, head of research, 45).

According to another respondent, the students have more power nowadays: ‘When they like their lecturer, they will fill in a good evaluation, and when they don’t like their lecturer will get a negative evaluation’ (Nl2d, woman, associate professor, 46). That is why some lecturers are frightened of the evaluations. Two respondents explicitly stated that the current evaluation system is not an appropriate instrument for evaluating the quality of education.

One British interview showed that the evaluations are used for all kinds of purposes, but not directly in relation to the quality of teaching:

> I: OK. What is the faculty doing with those evaluations?
> P: Well, just using them for door stopping?
> I: Door stopping?
> P: Put them down there where the doors …
> I: Ha ha, okay.
> P: Well the formal answer is, it is considered carefully, and effective measures are taken. However, that is the ideal case. That would happen if the kind of demands were legitimate. But you get all kinds of student feedback, not in this institution but when I was at the University of X … Well, what can you do about this kind of thing, and most of the comments were like this. They also wrote, you know, in the form, because it is multiple choice, they created words … dad, dad. d-a-d.
> I: So you cannot take that seriously?
> P: Yes, exactly, because students didn’t take it seriously.
> (UK3c, man, full professor, 37)

The Dutch respondents indicated that the quality of teaching had been reduced to the scores received from the students. For example, at one Dutch university the scores vary between A, B and C, where A is excellent, B is doubtful and C can be a reason to exclude someone from a course. The questionnaires (evaluation of teaching) are particularly used to ‘punish’ people (Nl3b, woman, lecturer, late 40s). However, ultimately teaching is not why academic staff are here. Some staff members get away with very mediocre teaching for a long time (Nl3d, woman, PhD student, late 20s). However, if lecturers teach inadequately, which is to say obtain low scores over a long period of time, they may eventually get a yellow or red card from the teaching director (Nl3a, man, lecturer, late 40s). Yellow indicates the need to improve your teaching, and red signifies that you will not be allowed to continue teaching the subject. Some respondents find that the basis on which you are judged and the actual discussions around teaching are too focused on output:

> There is always the discussion about the schedules. It is never about the content, about what management science actually is, how do we differ from other faculties, what are our strengths. The discussion about the content seems no longer relevant. (Nl3b, woman, lecturer, late 40s)

Still, the respondents find a lot of enjoyment in their own teaching:

> Teaching is most fun if it is related to your own research, and concerns your own expertise. (Nl3d, woman, PhD student, late 20s)

> It is very paradoxical. On the one hand, I particularly enjoy teaching grown-up, sensible students, support them in their learning process. On the other, we spend too much time talking about managerialism, keeping track of working hours, administrative procedures. (Nl1d, man, PhD student, 28)

The respondents acknowledge that the teaching workload has increased due to a much higher student/staff ratio or increased emphasis on an adequate teaching performance. If your teaching is inadequate, this will be reported in your yearly evaluation with your supervisor. It plays a role in the case of promotion or renewal of your contract: 'We manage barely to keep going, but that is all. There is no time for new things, for taking a breath' (Nl3b, woman, lecturer, late 40s).

The changes perceived by the respondents generally involve more performance assessment in terms of research as well as teaching. Research is increasingly assessed through measurement and the ranking of performance. The respondents generally dislike the bureaucracy involved with research assessment, and the quite dramatic negative sanctions that may follow if publication criteria are not met (e.g. exclusion from the research assessment exercise, loss of research time). It seems that increased control over the research process indirectly results in more control over the actual content of research, which will eventually lead to leaner and scantier research. Concerning teaching, there is no doubt that more emphasis is being placed on quality assessment, but this does not improve the quality of teaching as a primary process. Instead, the increased workload and administrative pressures seem to depreciate the quality of teaching.

Reflection on theory

This article attempts to show that new institutional theory, which explains the stability of and the homogeneity between universities, and professional theory, which explains the tension between professionals and managers, in combination prove to be a fruitful and dynamic set, which can help to explain the compliant and pragmatic reactions of academic professionals. In short, each of the three categories identified – symbolic compliance, professional pragmatism and formal instrumentality – provide partial explanatory value for interpreting the reactions of the respondents.

Symbolic compliant behaviour is visible in the manner in which the respondents deal with evaluations of teaching: for example, they use them for 'doorstopping', and do not really care for publication targets as long as these do not affect them directly. The respondents legitimate such behaviour by explaining how the current managerial developments depreciate the quality of the primary processes of teaching and research.

The respondents recognise the tension between content of research and bureaucratic control, but find that too much emphasis is placed on output, on 'wanting to score'. It seems that discussions about content are no longer relevant. Quite a few respondents fear that performance measurement can stimulate dysfunctional behaviour, and that the quality of teaching is deteriorating, with, for example, examinations that are easier to pass. The evaluation of courses and lecturers reduces teaching to the scores received from students. This implies that lecturers are frightened of evaluations, as they are used to punish or are not taken seriously into account.

In addition, a substantial part of the reactions by the respondents can be explained by professional pragmatism. These respondents accept that managerialism has a clear impact on the primary processes of higher education, but take this influence for granted and try to deal with it. For example, two Dutch respondents stated that they had found ways to deal with their loss of research time and had decided that they don't want to be frustrated by such measures. Other respondents are more critical and find that the quality of research is deteriorating, with the main emphasis on the desire for high scores. One respondent said that his head of department once said seriously, 'We are looking first for publications and then for quality' (Nl2b, man, assistant professor, late 40s).

The respondents from all thee countries explained that, for obtaining funding and realising publications, you have to conform to certain 'forums, focus on certain specialty areas' (Sg1, senior lecturer, man, 63) in order to improve your chances for success. Researchers must pursue research in the direction where they can find funding: 'I have decided to play the game according to the rules, and intend to win it' (Nl2a, woman, assistant professor, late 30s).

Only a small part of the respondents' reactions related to formal instrumentality. Some of the respondents consider evaluation of courses as beneficial and helpful in improving the quality of teaching. As one Dutch respondent explained, 'I like such [evaluation] systems; they are clear and open, a kind of language you speak' (Nl1a, man, senior support staff, late 40s). In terms of research, most respondents accept that there are norms for publication, and find that assessment of research is not undesirable in principle, but generally the norms for publications are unclear or arbitrary, which makes the respondents very critical about the actual research assessment system.

Conclusion

There is a clear move towards more measurable standards of performance in the working environment of the respondents from the three countries, for example in terms of international publications or external grants and funding. In teaching, there are similar developments, which emphasise the importance of student evaluations. We found evidence for this in all the universities studied. However, in Sweden, there are few sanctions on not achieving such standards, while in the Netherlands failure to publish internationally will lead to career stagnation and loss of research time. In the UK sanctions may be directly related to the work conditions; staff with a fixed-term contract are especially vulnerable. Hierarchical control is generally increasing, and the faculty dean has often obtained extended power that coincides with a 'professionalisation of the managerial kind of positions' (S1d, head of administration, man, 45).

While the managerial measures in research are of a similar nature (more output evaluation, more external influence) to those in teaching, the impact experienced by the respondents differs. Managerial pressures are felt much more intensely in research, as more drastic sanctions are at stake. In addition, research is likely to be considered the autonomous domain of the academic professional, while teaching has been under closer outside supervision for a longer time.

Respondents in the three countries showed a clear dislike of the growing administration, the increasing competition for research funding, the obligation to fill in time-consuming grant applications and the heavier workload. Examples of frustration and stress are omnipresent. However, while this may have affected their commitment to the organisation, their involvement with the content of their work is still clearly visible. Most academics work very long hours. Particularly interesting was the way some respondents managed to cope with the obligations imposed upon them. They found ways to work around these stressful obligations and survived by maintaining their autonomy and academic freedom through demonstrating symbolic compliant or pragmatic behaviour.

We found very little reason to expect a general improvement of research and teaching quality, although this is often the official argument behind policy initiatives from the managerial spectrum. Instead, many respondents felt it necessary to keep managerialism out of their doors, sometimes for principled, but often just for pragmatic reasons. While a few respondents acknowledged that some amount of managerialism in the right context could be helpful, the actual effect is that it works against its own intentions. This is often caused by the manner in which managerialism is implemented, without a direct relationship to the primary process, or acknowledging the specific nature of universities as professional, autonomous institutions. This is quite similar to the extensive Canadian study carried out by Townley, Cooper, and Oakes (2003), who demonstrated how initial enthusiasm by managers over performance management was eventually replaced by scepticism and cynicism, through a growing gap between the discourse of reasoned justification (e.g. achieving transparency, serving public interests) for managing performances and the practical operationalisation of such mechanisms.

In the current study, the pretext of enthusiasm is used to comply with managerial measures, while in other situations they are simply taken for granted. Only rarely did the respondents seem willing to rely on formal, managerial arrangements (e.g. quality control of teaching) to improve the fairness of decision-making or equality of opportunities at the faculty or department level.

Unfortunately, these developments only increase the disparity between the current reality and the utopian principle of the university as a close-knit, high-quality organisation, with a main purpose of 'intellectual pursuits and truthful thoughts' (Powell and Owen-Smith 1998: 267) by performing excellent, independent and innovative research, teaching students to be the best of their ability and maybe even playing an essential societal role as well. This utopia seems to be further away than ever.

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