The challenge of managing a large university in conditions of uncertainty

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This paper is written in the context of practice at Nottingham Trent University, using elements of its management as example or counterbalance to the literature. The challenge at the heart of the paper is that of practically balancing a managerial and business-focused culture and processes to support the aspirations and motivations of the university, the academic schools and their staff. I will use practical examples of management data, resource planning and information systems and their use, and describe how the Business Review Process supports the institution's need for performance review and allows the schools to link academic vision, localised strategy and business performance.

Keywords: management; resource planning; data; motivation; business

Introduction

Taking a lead from Warner and Palfreyman (1996, 3), this paper is written in the context of my work as Pro-Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and Head of College of Art, Design and the Built Environment at Nottingham Trent University (NTU). The challenge at the heart of the paper is that of practically balancing a managerial and business-focused culture and processes to support the aspirations and motivations of the university, the academic schools and their staff. I will use practical examples of management data, resource planning and information systems, and describe how the Business Review Process supports the institution's need for performance review and allows the schools to link academic vision, localised strategy and business performance. In parallel to the challenges and concerns of 'the university' are of course the concerns and challenges facing those who make up the university, its staff. A significant concern as yet hardly acknowledged is that of persuading an unsettled constituency that the university is capable and able to meet the challenges that face us and that their work and effort is best exerted in pursuit of (each) university's particular ambitions or direction of travel. There is no guarantee that the expected motivations and values of the past can be accurately projected into the future.

In the midst of all this managerial detail, however, it is important to emphasise the context in which we are working. We are reminded by Kubler and Sayers (2010) that scenario planning and strategic planning in universities can often be incrementalism taking for granted existing socio-economic contexts rather than any radical or profound change . The detailed work which is described therefore is the basis for institutional self-knowledge, understanding

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the present and the past as it works in NTU's case, so that in our horizon scanning and modelling, we can have a sense of how the institution might fare amid the radical changes we may need to make.

Defining the issue

New (post-92) universities and colleges of further education have been institutions most closely associated with 'managerial' approaches to institutional steering whilst pre-1992 or 'traditional' universities are more likely to claim a 'collegial model', or so goes the well-rehearsed narrative. Taking NTU as an example of a large post-92 university, in terms of scale of operation, size of turnover, degree of market orientation and complexity, as with many of its 'type' the university is similar to a large corporate business and as such has adopted some of their management characteristics. Shattock (2003) sets out many ways in which universities resemble private corporations. All universities have become complex and in their many contexts and to their 'stakeholders', important institutions, with all the attendant risks that 'failure' might bring. Continued turmoil is inevitable, recognised in Barnett's (1998, 20) description as 'in a climacteric'. Therefore, whether management is to manage away from the risk of failure or toward opportunity which requires some 'strategic prioritisation' (Borysiewicz 2011), it might be argued that all higher education institutions, from those ranked at the top to the bottom, require some significant steering. That is the 'strong steering core' at the university heart in Shattock (2003), and as more recently recognised in Borysiewicz's (2011, 3) description of Cambridge's Pro-Vice Chancellor roles as having 'grown in complexity even as the stakes get higher'.

The characteristics cited by Shattock as indicative of universities similar to corporate business include increased emphasis on environmental scanning; greater emphasis on staff capability as a competitive resource; proliferation of organisational integration; and an embedded and conservative attitude to financial management and expenditure. However, as the pressure on universities becomes more relentless and chaotic dissimilarities between corporate business and universities become more apparent. Institutions will need to utilise the powers their autonomy gives them as well as being responsive to the regulatory environment determined by political authorities to be more productive, cost-effective and ever more agile. Winston (1998), Johnson and Scholes (2002) identified features of difference between the private sector and public universities, which include the greater impact of political constraint, the significance of stakeholders' views (of strategic choices) and critically, the tendency for ideology to drive the motivations of staff. For Whitchurch (2006), distinctiveness is described in the sense of being a member of an institution (community), rather than an employee, with the sense of responsibility and ownership that might bring. These latter distinctions might be said to be growing in importance when considered with the emphasis on staff capability and the significant drive for change.

Clearly, this is not an extensive review of the literature nor does it detail the significant and extensive changes of the recent period. Nonetheless, it is argued that three points emerge: that modern universities need steering by management; that, however, closely higher education institutions (HEIs) resemble private corporations, the differences create unique and specific challenges for management; and that the challenge of engaging and motivating staff toward the purpose of the institution is critical (Watson 2009). For NTU, a large university operating in an environment of multiple and diverse influences and stakeholders, a key matter for attention is to engage all staff and resources toward our joint endeavour to the benefit of our students, our institution and society.

A large university: locating NTU

With over 25,000 students NTU qualifies as a large university. Created as a University by the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 with origins back to 1843, it grew out of diverse smaller institutions such as the School of Art, College of Technology and Education and Agricultural and Equine centre. Characteristically of a University in a small city outside London, it has been supported by the merchants, trades and professionals of the city. The two Universities (the other being the University of Nottingham) are clearly important to the city of Nottingham (around 50–55,000 students between them), their scale and connectedness to economic and cultural life make them together both drivers of economic growth and influential in terms of the physical and social characteristics of the city; but it is NTU that dominates the physical environment of a significant area of the city centre, with its scale and substantial upgrading and transformation of the city estate in the past five years.

The cultural and material challenges that faced the University in 2004 have largely been met. The University has significantly upgraded much of its estate and is engaged in further transformation on all three sites. At 2011/2012 it has moved from a recruiting to a selecting institution across the majority of provision; it is in control of its finances without undue reliance on international recruitment and importantly has maintained good levels of employability of its graduates and retention of its students. Its academic, operational and fiscal management have been effective with positive subject review and institutional audit outcomes, including for collaborative activity. The University is largely driven by the undergraduate cohort despite some important research particularly around cancer and bioscience and a large postgraduate portfolio. It has a well-established reputation for creative and vocational education (in the broadest sense) going back to its origins and founded in closeness to industry.

Despite this positive picture, a university such as NTU is arguably more significantly impacted by the tumultuous issues brought about by a new political will for environmental change and stakeholders' views driven by indignant media attention and the underlying sense of entitlement that flows from the rhetoric of 'customers' and 'consumers'. The University finds its 'traditional territories' eroded as all institutions respond to clamour for employability, value for money and newly created opportunities, and it finds itself faced with challenging and conflicting decisions to be made some of which could have significant consequences for the size, income and reputation of the university. NTU set its fee for 2012/2013 at a blanket £8500, with sufficient accommodations for its bid for 'core and margin' student numbers to be accepted.

The University mission is to deliver education and research that shape lives and society.

Managing complexity and size: factual structure of management

Writing in Shattock (2003) notes '… effective institutional management, in its broadest sense, represents an important factor in a university "punching above its weight" or, put less colloquially, performing better than its circumstances might suggest it could'. He continues '… success does not occur as a result of a single decision but because the institution finds ways of getting a lot of relatively small decisions right over a long period, and these decisions reinforce one another …' (2003, x). It is true that at NTU, the structure of management aims to achieve swift decision-making and information flow, encouraging academic schools to be individually ambitious and providing a supportive structure of professional services providing business partnership.
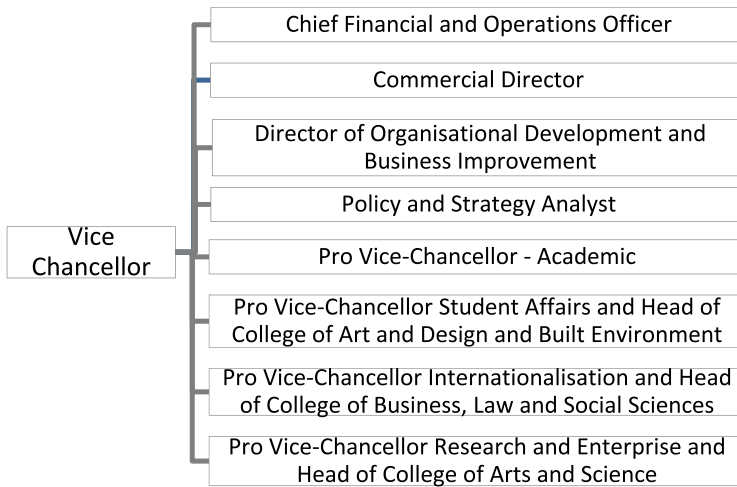
Figure 1.   Senior management team at NTU.

The Senior Management Team at NTU (Figure 1) is appointed to permanent posts and assumes defined areas of responsibility, with staff reporting directly to them. The Pro-Vice Chancellors (PVCs) also have strategic and management responsibility for colleges, which are the business units made up of two or more academic schools. The Deans lead the academic schools and report to PVC/Heads of College.

It might be considered that the character and composition of the Senior Management Team at NTU, representing a broad range of business, professional and academic experience and focus, naturally leads to the description of a managerialist culture, and in debate, this is often interpreted as a derogatory or pejorative term, but it is more complex in practice.

Drawing on the breadth and diversity of the senior management, NTU has benefited from processes and skills more often found in corporate worlds. But if and when there are successes, it is due to shared ambitions and values that in their application draw on a range of communication and implementation methods agreed around the management table. PVCs are academics, as is the Vice Chancellor, but their responsibilities for business achievements and service departments tempers and balances perspective and supports development of shared understandings. The permanence of the PVC role and staff and service reporting lines also supports the notion of balance between the academic and business priorities of the institution. Whilst the role of the Dean is more focused on academic matters, replicating a balance of responsibilities also signals the University's focus on business and academic success and might temper some of the more extreme effects, highlighted by Jarrett (1985, 33), of prioritising academic motivations over the needs and expectations of students or efficient business. The debate regarding the place of the academic in managing and determining the direction of travel in modern universities has been well covered, but a large university such as NTU does well to heed Shattock (2002, 235), who argued that the requirement is 'to realise effectively [their] respective contributions'. Management culture in NTU's case is less a matter of managerial vs. collegial but of focusing the skills of academic and professional teams on achieving ambitions set out in the Strategic Plan, and employing appropriate modes of organisation where change is required in response to challenge. In short, realising the business partnership ambition that NTU aspires to, and in the current climate of tumultuous and continual change, acknowledging that management teams more than ever need a range

of talents and the confidence and respect of the academy means the university draws confidence from its balancing of skills and culture. As Salter and Tapper (2002, 245) contend, universities need to adapt their structures using the principle of fitness for purpose rather than be encouraged in the 'erroneous belief that all universities are homogenous in their functions'.

In turn, each college is led by a management team which is a partnership between academics and professional business specialists, with the aim of focusing the majority of the Deans' efforts on academic matters and ensuring professional partnership and support for financial and business achievements (Figure 2).

A secondary partnership links these business facing specialists through to their respective central Professional Services teams to facilitate consultation and sharing of practice, and communication flow in regard to policy and practice across the institution (Figure 3: example of the Finance structure).

The communication flows from colleges to central leadership and professional and administration teams are central to gaining engagement and ownership across the institution. Reflecting on the wider issues regarding autonomy and how it is used, Watson (2000, 92) makes the point that 'in some jurisdictions' where autonomy is at a faculty or local level, it can restrict institutional freedom of action. There is the question of balance in reconciling the aspirations of individuals and departments with the needs of the business. Dearlove (2002, 257) suggests,

> academics (must be involved and prepared to lead, but they) must also work in partnership with administrators, in institutions that will be strong to the extent that there is a shared vision that makes the institution more than just the sum of warring departments.

He notes the importance of developing partnerships in a 'shared concern to confront dilemmas'. In the current context, not just business choices but the conflicts created in an intensified political environment where the heightened expectations of society and fee-paying students serve to deepen the conflicts.
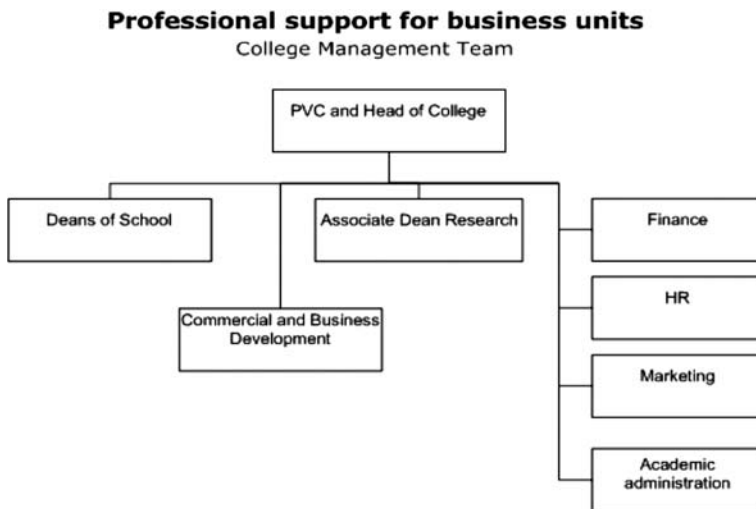

Figure 2.   College management partnership.

Professional support for business units

An example – Finance Structure

Director of Finance

Purchasing

Legal & Governance

Financial Services/Accounting

Planning, reporting and management accounting
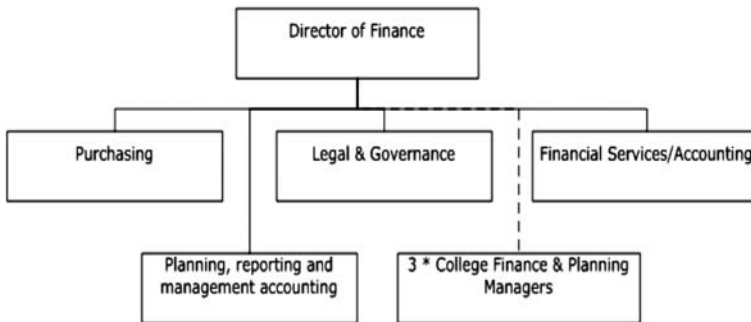
3 * College Finance & Planning Managers

Figure 3.   Secondary partnership through professional finance team.

An organisation then that is seeking to clarify its direction of travel and operational and delivery methods to achieve multiple and often apparently conflicting plans must scrutinise its approaches to strategic planning, and also consider how to signal its priorities and gain ownership across the academy. Firstly, reviewing the plethora of advice and support for the strategic planning exercise which is necessary as a condition of funding, practical necessity suggests that in a broad and diverse institution, a range of methods will be used and in practice might not match the text book description. This presumably is why there is such a quantity of advice in the first place, although as noted by Bryman (2009) for the leadership foundation for higher education (LFHE), little of it represents real guidance on precisely how (a leader) should go about it. Distilling down to three approaches more commonly utilised in UK HEIs, as in, 'planned', 'emergent' and 'realised', Slee (2011, 11) encapsulates the current approach at NTU, when he reveals his preferred approach is 'the realised strategy'. He describes this as featuring directions and targets that are 'top-down', but he suggests, with 'often a greater degree of buy-in than the more detailed planned strategy'. It is hard to disagree with his belief that this way of working might best be adapted to 'the radical changes of the future where the past may be no real guide to success'. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand et al. (1998, 373) urges '… ask better questions and generate fewer hypotheses – to allow ourselves to be pulled by the concerns out there rather than be pushed by the concepts in here'. But when the concerns out there are so many and varied and the concerns inside seek to be allayed, confidence must be built. The challenge of engaging and motivating staff to the purpose of the institution is critical.

Challenge of management in a climate of external pressure

The importance of developing a shared understanding of the past, present and future is not lost on NTU. Over time, and in common with many organisations, the university had relied upon local knowledge and data collection systems to inform its planning and reporting processes. The university faced the challenge of multiple corporate systems set up as the business developed and grew; structural changes and autonomous departmental decision-making had led to multiple and diverse coding structures, and departmental autonomy and lack of centralised and connecting systems led to limitations in institutional freedom of action and lengthy 'work arounds' to establish new reports. Reporting and data analysis were labour

intensive, reliant on key staff, subject to multiple blockages resulting in multiple versions and poor consistency of definitions. Systems had been customised and knowledge could be held by individuals who became 'experts' in the service of the institution. A portfolio review undertaken as a new Vice Chancellor took office was the catalyst for a complete appraisal of systems and the processes by which decisions were made. The result is that the institution has sought to bring together what over time had become a multiplicity of data and systems to create what the senior management hold to be 'one version of the truth'. In other words, collated data and business information drawn into a single reporting system, with both figures, comparisons and analysis available to be read down to the level of course or module, and openly available to layers of managers and teams. NTU developed a single reporting tool 'Cognos', utilising data warehousing (Figure 4).

'Cognos' delivers detailed visual reports of data on every aspect of the corporate enterprise direct to the desktop and visualised in a 'dashboard' using colour to benchmark against key performance indicators (KPIs) (Figure 5 showing the dashboard layout). The data have gone beyond that required for reporting externally and is now driving College and Professional Business Reviews and action planning down to course team level as the available data include finance, estates utilisation, PC availability, staff and student records and detail of applications and admissions.

Why might the university feel this to be an important breakthrough? Firstly, the institution itself needs confidence in its own data and its ability to develop its good judgement and resilience through that confidence, that is, confidence that enables considered risk taking as well as risk avoidance. The long ago shift from block to specific grants and the requirement for audit, monitoring and even the newly energised enthusiasm for 'fining' means that an institution must be ahead of its own reporting. Student numbers, for example, must be managed too. (a process that when described has brought many a dinner party to a thoughtful halt). League tables notoriously 'count what is measured' (Locke et al. 2008), and lowering the risk of surprises might be useful in planning short-term actions. Scenarios must be modelled and decisions taken based on information gathered and views and risks taken from across the institution. Both historical data analysis and its counterbalance, horizon scanning activity, 'must be a shared responsibility between corporate headquarters and the operating units' (Shattock 2003, 29). How else might a university caught between 'core and margin'
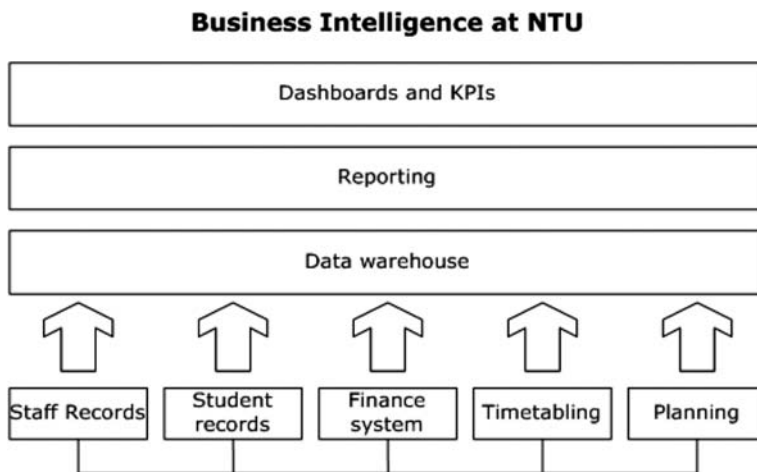

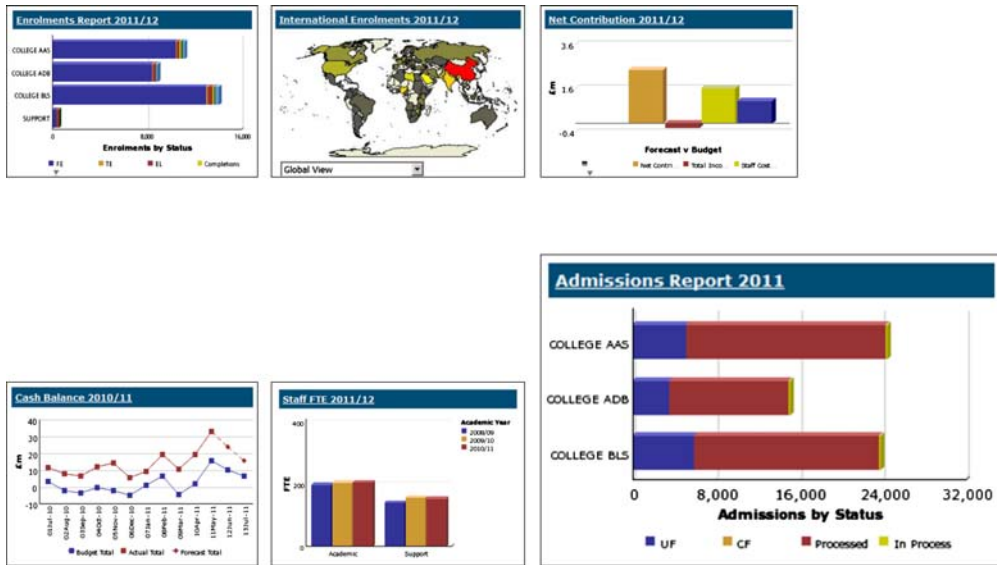Figure 4.   Business intelligence at NTU.

Figure 5.   NTU 'dashboard' with admissions report shown enlarged.

and losses and potential gains of prospective students with 'AAB' A level profiles take decisions regarding its intentions and the implications. 'Unintended consequences' now have the potential for significant impact upon a university's ability to balance its finances and afford its long-term plans. More than ever, direction of travel and definitions of what might constitute success must be set and tested in a process of learning, reflection and understanding so that performance 'is geared to achieving [it]' (Shattock 2003, 3).

Secondly, the university recognises that success is driven by the will of its academic units as well as financial and strategic acuity. Not only does the institution need to develop confidence amongst the 'academic heartland' and professional teams by evidencing command of its records. But recognising the diversity of fortunes and approaches across a multidisciplinary institution, transparency at a local level enables action and perhaps cross-subsidisation, to be taken toward success that is both local and supportive of the corporate enterprise. Further, this recognition is of the place in a large university of 'emergent' strategies that reinforce convergence between institutional direction and values and objectives and actual behaviours on an everyday basis. NTU financial reporting establishes budget, actual and end year forecast information down to a subject level so that the required reconciliation is achieved. KPIs, recording and monitoring, are set into a context where such work is understood to be the necessary underpinning to releasing time, effort and energy toward the more qualitative aspects that motivate the academy and have impact on the students themselves. Managers are supported by their business partners to develop shared understandings and perhaps a 'lingua franca' to set the data and its analysis into localised contexts and the daily choices of managers and their teams (Baldridge and Okimi [1982] in Birnbaum 2001, 239).

Thirdly, internal and external stakeholders must have confidence, from lending banks to partner corporations and prospective collaborators, parents, students and advocates. It is simplistic to suggest that stakeholders any more than the academy are persuaded only by data, performance indicators and analysis used as defence against short-term governmental priorities or media-driven 'attacks'. However, it is argued that there is a place for
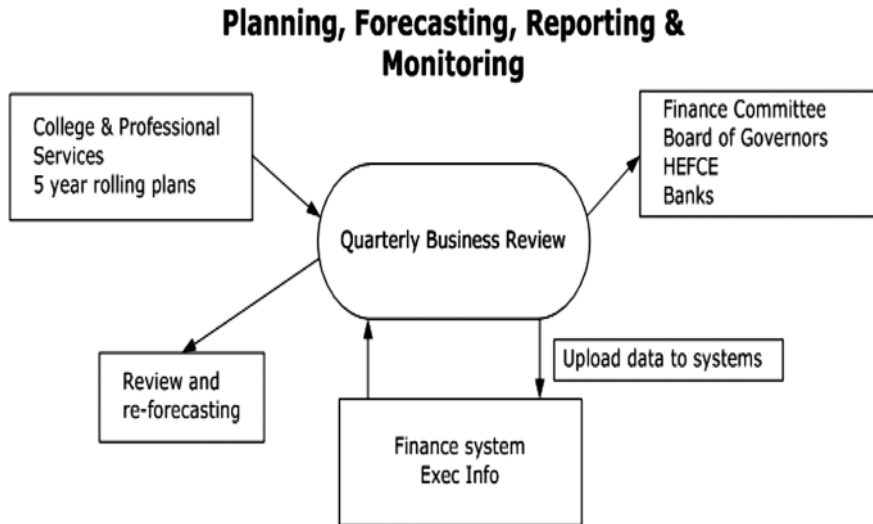
Figure 6. The quarterly business review process.

establishing confidence in institutional self-awareness alongside a narrative of academic and educational values. If we argue that the standardised data sets published in University 'Key Information Sets' lack sophistication then it might surely follow that we must construct our own measures and be able to not only rely upon the information but have the ability to employ the data and reasoning to respond to external ambiguity and the thirst for detail and information.

Significantly now, 'Cognos' reports are used for decision-making at every level of the institution from new business proposals to admissions decisions. 'Cognos' is also the source of business data and intelligence considered in quarterly business review (QBR) meetings, where each College Management Team meets with the University Senior Management Team, the Finance Director and occasionally others from central Professional Services. These reviews are an opportunity to finalise agreement around budgets, monitor business progress and discuss business developments as well as risk management approaches taken at local level. The detail available feels increasingly important as institutions absorb the implications of working within and across multiple (subject/discipline/sector) markets, collaborations and partnerships. Increasingly over time, the institution has the confidence and ability to rely on its historical data, which can be complemented and counterbalanced by detailed horizon scanning activity. What emerges then is the opportunity for an open and balanced discussion and decision-making in the context and amidst the 'riskiness' of the challenges of an unstable climate for higher education (HE). Further, the clarity and accuracy of the historical data, enhanced by the forecasts agreed at the QBR, allow the institution to enhance its reporting, modelling and planning activity at the highest level. Figure 6 describes the relationship of the QBR within the management context of the University as a whole and demonstrates the centrality of the review processes to university business.

Heart of the challenge

Scott's estimation in 2001 was that more than half of the expenditure in higher education went on staff. He highlighted the dual perspectives of increased productivity – or in the

sector's view – reduction in real terms budgets and lowering of unit costs. (Scott in Warner and Palfreyman 2001, 202) His view was that little of the gain in productivity at that time was due to investment in new technologies and almost all to better use of academic labour and management systems. At NTU, the first of the practical examples that have accompanied this paper is used to develop to a detailed level the institutions' knowledge of itself, our ability to use that information toward our shared ambitions, and indeed to assure the quality of reporting to external bodies. The second case, a workload management tool, has been used initially as a planning device for academic teams to match the requirement of curricula delivery and need to ensure time for scholarly activity and research with the available resource. The data reported through these instruments give managers and the university the opportunity to determine how resource and performance are geared toward achieving our plans, and importantly to release precious time and resource for individual and institutional goals. Scott foresaw the drive for ever greater efficiency, exploring possible scenarios and the potential for encouragements from government for alliances and focus on entrepreneurial means of diversifying income sources. In an elegant evaluation, he describes in glowing terms the achievement of (UK HE's) systemic balance between tradition preserved and innovation embraced, recognising the challenge of maintaining that balance and perhaps a triumph of successful management rather than 'managerialism'.

The importance of balancing tensions between individuals' allegiance and confidence in their respective disciplines or teams and the institutional business plan is not lost on NTU. For post-92 universities such as this, perhaps more evidently affected or expected to respond to the issues and pressures now experienced by the whole sector, the accepted 'purposes and role of HE' have always been layered with the intentions and additional pressures of local and central government for 'new' universities (linked to social and economic benefits) and the expectations of students and other stakeholders (of opportunity, widening participation, closeness to industry). These expectations have therefore required sensitive, or at least careful, blending with the aspirations of individual academics and departments. Wide recognition that academic work has intensified and come to include a broader range of activities that match institutions' planned strategic direction, respond to environmental change, and to the increasing expectations of stakeholders (Court 2006, 174) is a recognition welcomed by academics and managers as supportive of the discussion around the use of academic 'time'.

The basis and starting point for the workload project was the academic contract for teaching staff at Lecturer and Senior Lecturer levels which in post-92 institutions is understood to be more detailed numerically with guidance for deployment of an academic's working time across teaching (STD), teaching related duties (TRD), administrative tasks (AMA) and scholarly activity and research (SDA). Each academic staff member involved engages in discussion with their line manager (Head of Department or Team Leader), to start the planning process. Taking the point argued by Court, and to facilitate a transparent discussion in regard to academic workloads, the tool is structured so that a diverse range of activities and tasks are recognised and collated under the long-standing contract headings. Once the outline use of time is agreed, the tool calculates the total time and discussion then turns to what can be expected in terms of individual achievement in the time available. Collated data reflecting staff time and activity can then be reviewed individually and against course, team, department or the school goals for output, and allows managers to determine how precious resource is geared toward achieving both individual and institutional goals. Initially used as a planning device for academic teams to match the work to be done with the available resource, the data have also supported the institutional aspiration for parity and transparency in interpretation of the contract and has largely been accepted by the academy as

How the Planning Tool Can Add Value

Department	School	College	University
Ensure workloads are allocated	Provide Transparency	Link SDA to PDCR	Inform Strategic activity
Ensure fair workloads	Review AMA 'make-up'	Link SDA to Research Strategy	
Ensure compliance with the contract	Ensure time provisions are appropriate		
Target resources at local priorities	Release resource		
Informed use of flexible resources (HPLs)	Ensure address of corporate priorities		

Figure 7.   Discussion points for evaluating the workload tool introduced at NTU.

useful where ambitions and 'requirements' so often conflict. Whilst it is recognised that such detailed evaluation of time and outputs could and might be used as evidence of increasing bureaucracy, it is also true that in an environment where stress and overwork are increasingly recognised as impacting on job satisfaction and achievement (Pick, Teo, and Yeung 2012), such analysis and transparency are just one aspect of management pragmatism in action. Figure 7 offers a sense of the discussion around the academic workload and the link to organisational goals at a range of levels.

Accurate and available data and transparency are then significant tools for NTU. As pressures become greater and external information requirements suggest that 'excellence' might be measured in equal terms across institutions and disciplines, the availability of data to departments and individuals is important so that responses and planning can be both emergent and effective, and also feel reasonable at local level. The planning tools used by NTU are an attempt to create a framework to empower decision makers but also to protect time for 'core' academic work and to invest in activities that protect the longer-term future of knowledge development. The encouragement for participation and for partnership to develop is in the nature and transparency of the framework and the data which leads to local and individual identification with open information, making it unremarkable and understood as helpful. At NTU, we acknowledge that there are no easy answers to organising academic work; the objective is to leave time for the development of our educational work and scholarship. In Barnett's (1998) terms, room for the creative debate to move onto more forward looking discourse and 'what goes on in the world' that must affect the disciplines and development of the curriculum to be more future facing and appropriate to the significant and perpetual change affecting our lives.

Capability

To this point, this paper has focused on how a large university uses business-like processes and information to manage itself, and how the resultant information can be used to support emergent and localised strategies, and develop a 'shared concern to confront dilemmas', and sensitivity to the 'essentials of academic work and the drives of academics' (Dearlove 2002, 257). However, as he acknowledges and as noted at the beginning of the paper, in a mass system, Universities are dominated by the significance of their undergraduate portfolio and

must attend to the quality of their teaching. The concerns and capabilities of staff are critical to the enterprise, and whilst in challenging quality managers, Barnett offers an ideal: the formation of a 'transparent culture of self willed caring about quality such that … quality becomes a virtuous idealogy, internally constituent of and thereby improving of academic activities, and with which academics identify because it springs from their own agendas' (Barnett 2003, 98), nonetheless an institutional response is required. In Bryman's (2009, 39) report for LFHE, he comments on a range of research considering leadership approaches and strategies and conditions necessary to deliver change. He also highlights the consistencies with previous work that suggests to maintain academic engagement with institutional goals, academics need to understand why change is required and also that they will be supported to effect the changes. As an institution with a focus on teaching, it is appropriate that the University should be concerned with the quality and recognition of teaching and support for its staff who engage in teaching. At NTU, we believe that this accords with the goals of the academy and with notions of prestige and the legitimacy and respect that comes from recognition of the quality of professional work (Blackmore and Kandiko 2012). In short, we believe these goals are shared with the academy and not at odds.

Responding to the premium placed on the teaching function in a sector facing increasing political and social pressures and anticipating future calls for evidence of professionalism, NTU is in the process of developing a framework for Learning and Teaching professional development. The framework builds upon previous and existing work including that of the HEA and our own Research Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework. For individuals, it will support their development so that they can evidence and accredit their professional work, and for the institution, it will support the delivery of our academic plan, policy and teaching quality standards. The framework directly supports the NTU Academic Plan and our commitment to ensuring all staff who teach and support learning at NTU are developed professionally. It is aligned with the national (HEA) framework and national and institutional Research Development frameworks and complements the NTU Management CPD framework. Moreover, the framework and indeed this supportive and participatory nature of developing capacity linked to change accords with the approaches suggested in Pick, Teo, and Yeung (2012), who describe the effects of 'New public management' reforms in Australian universities and examine the causal relationships between organisation change, external and internal stresses and job satisfaction. Whilst they offer no conclusion regarding the benefits or otherwise of changed or increasingly managed academic contexts, they encourage the notion that stress and concerns might be considerably lessened where employee professionalism is recognised, and participation in the change process is actively encouraged. The next stage of development in meeting the challenges for NTU therefore is a continuing professional development framework that recognises and accredits our academic staff's professionalism and offers the opportunity for the development and engagement alongside colleagues and peers.

Conclusions

In his epilogue for the Leadership Foundation (Watson in Kubler and Sayers 2010, 47), Watson concludes that managing the future on the part of any university senior management involves:

- Understanding the past and the present condition of your institution.
- Getting the resources right, so that there is a zone of freedom of action in which to operate.

- Understanding the terms of trade of the business especially its peculiar competitively cooperative nature.
- Helping to identify a positive direction of travel for the institution.
- Engaging progressively with that direction of travel.
- Optimistically trusting the instincts of the academic community operating at its best.

Universities produce, teach and transfer knowledge and have a role in innovation. They are therefore crucial to their regions and to the national interest. Universities and all higher education providers are understood to be key to societal development and increasingly, under pressure to respond to public and governmental expectations for access to HE on one hand, and socio-economic success on the other. At NTU, we are rising not just to the challenge of size but of being a part of a mass system that feels suddenly halted or certainly changed. The sense is of a sector that feels under attack or at least undermined, all our good and honourable intentions suddenly suspect. However, if we believe in the criticality of education then rising to these challenges in ways that reflect Scott's earlier glowing description, that is to embrace opportunity and innovation and also preserve ubiquitous notions of quality, we must hold onto our nerve, beliefs and aspirations in this extraordinary and seemingly protracted 'climacteric' (Barnett 1998, 20).

Advice and development support is freely available but what is not so clear, including from Watson's bullet points noted above, is exactly how an individual, large, modern institution might pursue the adjustments that are entailed by continual change in academic environments and contemporary politics and society. Moreover, how to manage the conflicts inherent in actual present-day academic environments; how to lead, guide and create opportunity whilst encouraging empowerment and entrepreneurialism? Temple (2005) advised against adoption of management fads, arguing that imposing 'top-down' planned approaches (to change) might be surprising in contemporary western Universities. Making a wider point on how autonomy is used, however, Watson (2000, 92) makes the point that in 'some jurisdictions' where autonomy is at a faculty or local level, it can restrict institutional freedom of action. So contradictions and conflicts are built into the system and need to be considered. Seeking to learn and adapt the processes of business corporations and make them our own brings benefit to NTU in managing size and complexity. Management in this environment draws much from theoretical and business models, but is also a matter of pragmatism in the face of conflicting ideals and priorities. Harnessing historical data and using transparency in both reporting and planning feel like management rather than managerialism and support the institution in finding information and processes most likely to support achievement of our plans. Practically it involves linked academic, business and financial planning and review processes, a process of reconciling academic aspiration with business need. It also involves engaging the academy alongside professional and management colleagues in meaningful and effective partnerships toward framing and achieving shared goals, and it is critical for the success of the endeavour.

Notes on contributor

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