Lost in translation: aligning strategies for research in New Zealand

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In New Zealand, the funding of higher education research has been influenced by revised policy-driven imperatives. Amidst the institutional reactions to new criteria for governmental funding, individual academics are being asked to increase their productivity in order for their employing institution to access public funding. For this to occur, these three stakeholders need to have a reasonable understanding of one another's core research objectives and align, as best possible, the strategies they employ to achieve them. This alignment of effort is not without challenges: it may, for example, result in ambivalence as staff resort to behaviours that contest institutional powers over their changing roles and responsibilities. In order to address these challenges, there needs to be further reflection on how the efforts of all parties can be better aligned and collaboratively integrated.

Traduction infidèle : harmoniser les stratégies de recherche en Nouvelle-Zélande

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En Nouvelle-Zélande, le financement de la recherche universitaire a été influencé par la révision des impératifs politiques. Parmi les réactions institutionnelles aux nouveaux critères de financement du gouvernement, les universitaires sont invités à augmenter leur productivité afin de permettre à leur institution d'accéder à un financement public. Pour ce faire, les trois acteurs concernés doivent avoir une bonne compréhension des objectifs de recherche de base de chacun et harmoniser, du mieux possible, les stratégies employées pour les réaliser. Cet alignement de l'effort n'est pas sans difficultés : il peut, par exemple, engendrer une ambivalence comme le recours du personnel à des comportements qui remettent en cause les pouvoirs institutionnels par rapport à l'évolution de leurs rôles et responsabilités. Afin de relever ces défis, il faut continuer à réfléchir sur la manière dont les efforts de toutes les parties peuvent être mieux alignés et coordonnés.

Introduction

There is increasing interest and debate around the impact of higher education sectoral changes on the individual academic and the fruition of institutional objectives. At a time when policy changes are creating continual and repeated modifications to higher education working and learning conditions, we hear many anecdotal stories of the tension between the revision of institutional directions and academic staff reactions.

This paper examines the theorising that underpins this tension and identifies a number of potential causes and outcomes. It also highlights particular processes that, when carefully designed and enacted, can facilitate more effective working relationships. Our premise is that during change, much depends on clear communication between parties as well as compatible contributions towards shared objectives. If institutional aims and directives are inadequately communicated and understood, there is a danger that much can be "lost in translation" resulting in lowered staff engagement. Lastly, we identify mechanisms that can alleviate misunderstandings and align practices to fulfil a common purpose.

The international higher education research scene has changed significantly over the last two decades, as the focus on advancing knowledge and understanding has become subsumed into a complex arena of research assessment regimes, increased competition for research funding and changed perceptions of what constitutes "research". Governments have been tying research policy and funding to social and economic benefits (with perceived emphasis on the latter: note, for example, Denham [2009] in the United Kingdom), thus strongly influencing the push for research productivity within higher education institutions and by individual academic staff members. This international research policy trend is equally evident in New Zealand (Mapp, 2009).

At the same time, governmental reforms have included new mechanisms for directing and funding educational objectives, pressuring the leaders of institutions to look for new ways to meet revised state expectations. In order to realise these policy directives and expectations, institutions have been forced to adapt. Of necessity, this process has involved change and, in some cases, institutional re-structuring as well as revised policies and procedures. In the context of this changing higher education environment, leaders at all levels are strategising to address "contemporary performance pressures"

(Mintrom, 2008, p. 231). Academic staff within these institutions are, in turn, balancing these new demands for research with those for teaching and service. Since it is acknowledged that one of the significant challenges for organisations is "getting everyone committed to move in the same direction" (Green, 1999, p. 51), in this paper we examine the inter-relationships between the parties and the consequent tensions when research objectives are neither understood nor synchronised.

While universities are repositioning themselves in their changed economic environment, there is a concurrent need to reframe the resourcing and management of their organisation's academic research. Since the output of academic researchers affects the nation's research productivity, it is salient to identify the optimal employment and environmental conditions to realise enhanced outcomes (Madden, 2009). Furthermore, it is important that the values and objectives of all parties are fully understood (Winter, 2009). Since government policy shapes the sector in which universities operate, it will inevitably influence the broader context for organisational identity. Universities, however, are slow to change and tend to retain certain organisational cultures that are internalised by their staff (Mintrom, 2008). Therefore, how the university strategises to address changed policy and seeks to convey its purpose via its management infrastructure will inevitably influence staff engagement. Consequently, we also examine how the transparency and strength of these linkages impact on eventual outcomes and the likely realisation of policy objectives.

Significant changes to the research environment have been occurring on an international level in reaction to an increase in managerial accountability (Deem, 1998). This is evident in the New Zealand context, resulting in "relegating or repositioning individuals within their institutional contexts and reconstructing the nature of their academic work" (Codd, 2005), including the requirement for increased research productivity. Taking New Zealand as our place of reference, we examine the level of congruence between more recent national policies for higher education in this country and organisational and individual responses. Our intention is to highlight how the practices of these three parties, namely the government, the institution and the individual academic, do not always reflect a common purpose. What matters to academics may not coincide with how their employing organisation sees fit to execute governmental policies. In addition, when institutions respond to governmental directives, unless these imperatives exhibit relevant sectoral goals which are clearly articulated, meanings may become obfuscated and the translation of objectives confused. This misalignment of understandings may result in unintended outcomes, some of which are identified here. It is also apparent that this situation can affect individual staff. In a previous research study which examined the effect of a newly introduced research assessment

regime on staff identity, Billot (2010) noted that revised expectations can impact heavily on the professional roles and responsibilities of academic staff.

One form of institutional strategising to invigorate the academic environment is an increased focus on stimulating a research culture, which is now becoming a priority for the research agenda, as noted in the United Kingdom (Deem and Lucas, 2007). New frameworks are being constructed to develop supportive and dynamic contexts for research. The effect of these strategies does not remain at the national and institutional level, for any move to increase research capacity and productivity will automatically impact on individual academics. How well then, in the New Zealand context, do national, institutional and individual objectives and activities perform in concert? How much does ambiguity (Piderit, 2000) between, and indifference towards, the objectives of the three parties get in the way of a collective endeavour? As academics who have participated in efforts within an institution to co-ordinate and harmonise these three separate, yet interlinked entities and their objectives, we question whether policy goals can be realised without a smoother dovetailing of targets and endeavours. While we retain a level of scepticism that **full** alignment can occur, we side with Kaplan and Norton's (2006) view that alignment has the potential to unlock unrealised value from enterprise synergies. In so doing, we aim to contribute to the current discourse on the alignment of strategies. More particularly, while higher education teaching and research are strongly connected, we focus here on *research* in higher education, particularly in emerging research-active institutions.

Kaplan and Norton (2006), in their extensive studies of organisational development and change, have observed that uncoordinated efforts can result in "conflicts, lost opportunities and diminished performance". We echo that premise by suggesting that alignment is not a binary concept (alignment or non-alignment), but it exists along a continuum of synergies and co-ordination. Since non-alignment can cause concern through a lack of comfort and reduced performance (Green, 1999), it is clearly counter-productive. Therefore we contend that a move towards fuller alignment (acknowledging that this complete alignment is an unlikely outcome in practice) offers the potential for greater effectiveness and staff engagement. While organisations have restructured to address the external call for efficiency, in doing so, both intended and unintended outcomes may result, given that any activity at national and institutional level will obviously impact on the individual academic staff member. Since the implementation of national objectives involves translation at the level of the institution, we believe that it is imperative to examine this translation and the degree of correspondence between the vision and objectives of all parties in the sector.

National context and background

A note about terminology: while this paper is concerned with **higher education** research, in New Zealand terminology "higher education" is subsumed within the formal term "tertiary". The latter encompasses all post-secondary education and therefore includes "higher education". We will attempt to use each term appropriately and restrict the use of the term "tertiary" to occasions that reflect its use in New Zealand.

In order to contextualise the topic focus we first describe the tertiary sector in New Zealand, which is being challenged to adapt to a paradigm shift of educational values. Arguably the two most significant policy changes affecting research in New Zealand tertiary education in the last 20 years have been the 1990 amendments to the Education Act 1989 and the introduction of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) in 2003. The former opened the door for non-universities to offer degree and postgraduate programmes and paved the way for the bulk funding of institutions based on enrolled students, including – significantly – a research component. The latter removed this research component from bulk funding and reallocated it through the PBRF as a new means of measuring and funding research in tertiary institutions.

The 1990 amendment to the Education Act 1989 changed the face of New Zealand tertiary education. It provided a legislated means for non-universities to offer degrees, and linked research and teaching for universities and other institutions engaged in more advanced learning by requiring that "their research and teaching are closely interdependent and most of their teaching is done by people who are active in advancing knowledge" (Education Act 1989, Section 162.4a). All institutions offering degrees therefore needed to develop their own research agendas and while this was "business as usual" for the established universities, it was new territory for non-universities. Throughout the 1990s, all institutions offering degrees received research top-ups within their bulk grants according to the number of students enrolled in degree and postgraduate programmes. While research productivity remained a cornerstone of university development, this was a new phenomenon for the non-universities and the development of a research culture within the latter became a matter of pride rather than audit. Significantly, there was no direct evaluative link between the research funding received by an institution and the research undertaken by that institution.

It was during this period of very rapid expansion and growth in tertiary participation that some non-universities began to envisage becoming universities. Once this dream became enshrined in strategic intent, the research agendas of these institutions became high priority and they sought to be more like their university counterparts (Codling and Meek, 2006). Overall, in the tertiary sector, research still remained essentially self-referential, in

that universities and other institutions undertaking research referenced their progress against their previous year's performance, rather than some external benchmark. For individual staff, research remained an essential activity for the serious university academic, with the dictum "publish or perish" (Smith, 2005a) central to their career path. For staff in institutions new to research, their research activity was, at least initially, self-motivated and conducted largely in the absence of institutional support and understanding.

This environment changed dramatically with the advent of the PBRF, which was established with the primary goal "to ensure that excellent research in the tertiary sector is encouraged and rewarded" (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008, p. 3). With the introduction of the PBRF, institutions' research became assessed, rated and funded according to prescribed research performance. The PBRF regime requires certain processes. Eligible staff are required to submit evidence portfolios which have three components: research outputs (70% weighting), peer esteem (15% weighting) and contribution to the research environment (15% weighting). An overall rating is applied to each portfolio which attracts a differentiated financial return to the institution. Institutional participation in the PBRF was optional, but essential for any tertiary institution which was serious about research and wished to be funded for this research. The first PBRF quality evaluation was reported in 2003, and a second partial round was reported in 2006. The next full round is scheduled for 2012.

Two very clear messages are evident from the design and implementation of the PBRF. First, that the research performance of an institution is inexorably connected to income generation; second, that this research performance is primarily determined by measuring individual staff outputs (which are essentially composed of publications). While peer esteem and contribution to the research environment are identified as important parts of the evidence portfolios of eligible staff, these dimensions are often afterthoughts compared with the drive to boost publications. Arguably, then, there has been a subtle shift from a focus on **research** to a focus on **publication**, and the " publish or perish" mantra of the traditional university academic has now become the imperative of the research-engaged institution. In other words, the quality objective of the PBRF has become a quantity objective for institutions and therefore for their staff.

A third major change for New Zealand's tertiary institutions, resulting from the PBRF, has been the advent of research performance league tables for these institutions (Smith, 2005b). These are published in newspapers such as the *New Zealand Herald* and are based narrowly on data extracted from the published PBRF outcomes. These tables have become of somewhat extravagant interest to institutions for their reputational impact. The desire to be New Zealand's number one research institution, however inappropriate the

measuring device, is intense amongst leading universities. Just as intense is the desire for research-active non-universities to demonstrate that in specialist areas, their research is as good as, if not better than, that of their established university colleagues.

All of this has resulted in an unspoken shift in institutional expectations: academic staff who are teaching at degree level are expected to develop evidence portfolios that will result in a rating (and therefore a financial return to the institution) or scale down their involvement in degree teaching so that they no longer qualify as "eligible" staff. Research also becomes, subtly, a competitive endeavour, with individual academics looking to secure their own evidence portfolios at the possible expense of collaborative research. Rarely, it seems, in this brave new research world, is there sufficient space to consider the relevance and application of research to teaching and learning. There has been an overall shift from the pure ideals of a research agenda dedicated to adding to the body of knowledge, supporting teaching at degree and postgraduate level and the pursuit of a spirit of enquiry amongst the academic community, to a focus on a financial return for the institution, the ranking of the institution on media-driven league tables, and the personal careers and promotion prospects of individual academics.

Institutional responses

Institutional reactions to governmental and fiscal imperatives and constraints have required an evaluation of the organisational culture and a consequent move to build a contemporary research profile. How the institution manages to translate the policy-based directives into a strategic plan depends upon their organisational character and established objectives. The implementation of change may occur at the organisational level or more commonly be devolved through faculty and department/school-based strategies. Whatever the mechanism, it is noticeable within New Zealand tertiary institutions that the workplace has been altered through increased managerialism and bureaucracy, as noted in Australia (Debowski, 2007) and in the United Kingdom (Deem, 1998), in an effort to facilitate increased accountability.

Research-active institutions are, indeed, in a bind. They are, appropriately, committed to research, but a primary driver for research has become the PBRF assessment and the income that flows from it. To maximise this income, institutions are raising publication targets for individual staff. This in turn is requiring more time that comes at the expense of either teaching and learning or service. Ironically, with all institutions raising their research performance in the hope of increasing their PBRF income and

standing, unless the pool of available funds increases, institutions' financial returns from this increased effort will not significantly change.

As prior PBRF assessment panel members, Kane *et al.* (2005) note that the staff assessment portfolios are challenging to compile and attention needs to be focused on evidence that indicates quality of research performance. Increased individual research performance therefore lifts institutional performance and increases funding to the institution. Crucial to this search for increased institutional performance is a need to develop a working culture that is more productive. This institutional focus has been seen as crucial for the survival of many higher education providers in western jurisdictions, especially amongst new and emerging universities (Hazelkorn, 2005). In recent times there has been more exploration as to what comprises such a research context, particularly through the strengthening of research capacity and capability (Deem and Lucas, 2007). Ironically, Brunetto and Farr-Wharton (2005) have noted that educational institutions conventionally use a "process approach to manage systems and structures and implement incremental changes", whereas it is leadership, organisational culture, resourcing and reward practices that influence the most positive academic responses. Furthermore, Madden (2009) has observed that providing a supportive environment would "ensure the right combination of recognition and reward" (p. 281). Research cultures need to be flexible enough to adjust to changing policy requirements, yet remain supportive for staff engagement and productivity. As workplaces are "atypical" (Lee and Boyd, 2003, p. 199), environmental structures and processes need to be part of contextualised practices and as the individual staff member is positioned within the heart of this context, so the circumstances of their workplace require careful institutional planning.

Green (1999) believes that there are varied ways in which organisations can attain organisational alignment where everyone works towards common objectives. Personal alignment occurs when the institution assists individuals to identify how their own objectives overlap with those of their employing organisation and this involves effective dialogue between both parties. Structural alignment involves linking the organisation's identity with human resource processes that clarify how every staff member fits into the bigger picture (*idem*). The combination of both of these alignment strategies provides the context for enhanced collaborative performance and is facilitated through participation by individuals as they "see how their actions relate to their institution's identity" (Green, 1999, p. xiv).

There are conflicting perceptions of how well institutions are managing changes to their organisation. Since the academic community is made up of diverse disciplines and individuals comprising varied "communit(ies) of scholars" (Harris, 2005, p. 424) and there is no longer a **single** academic

profession (Nixon, 1996), it is likely that there will be disparities between individual and institutional objectives and actions. As individuals, academics prefer a sense of belonging, either through accepting the temptation to align and identify with disciplinary silos (Macfarlane, 2006), or being part of sub-cultures (Viitanen and Piirainen, 2003). Academics tend to have less affinity with the institution as a collective body, compared to their commitment to their own discipline. Therefore, as an institution moves to implement national directives, how it conceptualises and implements organisational change is crucial.

If academics do not feel supported in their working environment, resentment against institutional leaders can build and it may appear that senior management is only interested in meeting government-imposed key performance indicators. This behaviour is exemplified at the level of interaction with research staff by "dividing and ruling staff in an environment of resource constraints" (Winter, 2009, p. 126). Winter ascribes this type of conduct to some academic managers (those occupying a professional position in the higher education hierarchy) who may use their power and authority in discourses that alienate and disenfranchise certain academics. An example of this within the research sphere is when, in adopting PBRF terminology, individual staff members are referred to as being "research inactive", even though they may be engaged in research, but do not quite reach the PBRF threshold for being "research active". In order to retain and attract research-active staff to the institution, the executive needs to ensure that efforts to enhance productivity do not fuel competition between staff, creating an environment of distrust and unpleasant working conditions (Mintrom, 2008). Effective modes of communication and consultation can alleviate such collegial tensions and engage academics across the organisation to work collaboratively for collective gains.

The individual academic

This section focuses upon the individual academic, the person "in the field" who has primary face-to-face contact with students and links back to their professional discipline. Institutional change is impacting on staff as they strive to manage often conflicting roles and responsibilities.

The role of the individual academic comprises both professional responsibility and academic contribution. Academics teach, assess and develop improved teaching practices; they manage academic responsibilities and, in many cases, undertake a multitude of administrative and service functions. In addition, individual academics are expected to undertake research, develop national and international linkages, access external funding, contribute to the institutional and extra-institutional research

environment, as well as have their research performance regularly assessed within an external funding context. Such multi-tasking has in the past been largely accepted by academics as being part of academia, although the type of expectations has more recently changed. While Lee and Boyd (2003, p. 189) believe that research is now the "normal" work of an academic, there is, more recently, renewed pressure to enhance teaching portfolios, leading to a conflict of priorities (Debowski, 2007). Such tensions pose threats and opportunities to academic staff since roles and responsibilities are subject to continual review and revision (Lee and Boyd, 2003).

Institutional changes, then, can affect an academic's identity or "sense of self" since there is constant fluidity of identity in relation to contextual changes and alterations to roles and responsibilities may even cause academic staff to have multiple interpretations of who they are (Churchman, 2006). Such experiences present contradictions and compromises which Stronach *et al.* (2002) believe can cause tension between how academics view the ecologies of practice (one's own beliefs and practices which have developed during work over time) and the economy of their performance (how professionals are assessed and evaluated). Where there appears to be a mismatch of professional expectations, academics are querying the changes that now contest their prior assumptions of the composition of the academic environment (Silver, 2003). Where there are increasing demands on individual performance, employees' expectations of their employing institution may, in turn, increase. They are less willing to be excluded from the decisions on organisational change and expect the institutional executive body to take more cognisance of providing supportive structures and processes. Since the individual sense of worth and identity have a significant effect on the effectiveness of workplace positioning (Billot, 2010), it is more conducive if academics and institutions work in concert (Harris, 2005).

Trowler (1998) offers a useful categorisation of responses that individuals may have during a period of change. Unquestioned compliance with the change or "sinking" is the first category, often occurring without any voiced dissent about deteriorating conditions. The second category is "swimming" when conscious acceptance occurs and actions mirror that acceptance. Third, staff may use coping strategies to manage the changes, while the fourth category implies staff rebellion or manipulation of the environment to appease disgruntlement. Naturally, as Trowler points out, these categories are not mutually exclusive and an individual may move between them in order to suit the circumstances. Worthington and Hodgson (2005, p. 97) would add another behavioural trait, as academics "distance" themselves in order to avoid being made responsible. These frames for examining academic reactions can be useful when identifying how academics react to a changed situation.

When an institution moves to revise research expectations, certain elements of the workplace inevitably alter. This change may be on a relatively large scale through structural reorganisation, or at a more micro level through the departmental allocation of resources or individual employment agreements. Structural changes may involve new and redundant roles and positions, as well as changed lines of authority and management. Changes at the individual level may entail heavier workloads, as teaching is managed alongside research with increased expectations for outputs and/or the acquisition of external funding. So the individual is part of and, at the same time, subject to organisational change. While institutions may re-shape their structure or *modus operandi* in response to national imperatives, academics observe and react to any restructuring and re-visioning that result in them having less control over changes to their working environment. Also, individuals will respond very differently to change, usually as a consequence of their personal values and beliefs. Consequently, the priorities of institutions may clash with the principles held by individuals (Briggs, 2007), particularly when the publicly stated purpose of the institution is to teach students, while the strategy-in-action suggests the primacy of a research agenda. Such a disparity of objectives can cause employer-employee relationships to become stretched, with academics becoming indifferent (Presthus, 1979) or distanced (Worthington and Hodgson, 2005), and retreating to more familiar spaces within their own departments or discipline-specific groups. This action is then a constraint to collective objectives being met and puts pressure on institutional leadership.

Discussion

The relationship between the three identified stakeholders in New Zealand, and in higher education internationally, is complex. Each group will shift its mode of operating when national imperatives create revised landscapes for the provision and funding of education. Providers may respond by identifying a competitive edge as well as addressing the demands of the revised funding regime. Individual academics respond to their institutional demands with varied types of responses. Inevitably tensions arise as all parties reposition themselves. The challenge then is to aim for reasonable alignment of all agencies and practices within a unified direction. In reality, it is more likely that unless national directives are clearly articulated to the institutional executive, multiple interpretations may confuse and undermine the implementation of revised policies. Furthermore, ambiguity may be present in the progression from national policies to institutional responses through to individual reactions. Any lack of clarity will cause further uncertainty and possible ambivalence to addressing directives that may appear to have irrelevant meanings or insufficient resourcing. Whilst

government imperatives are unlikely to be designed to meet with institutional and academic approval, unless a working degree of alignment is apparent, it is even less likely that all parties will engage in a constructive and collaborative endeavour. In the case of institutional funding, the PBRF requirements have affected the balance between an employing institution and the employed academics. A constructive context would be to nest accountability demands within a supportive environment in which there is alignment between espoused and actual support.

In the 2003 film Lost in Translation, two characters meet in a less than familiar context and suffer confusion and misunderstanding. By borrowing from the title of this film, we suggest that when the parameters for communication are not shared and the communication itself between all parties does not address this difference, the realisation of objectives may be thwarted through ambiguity and unclear intentions. In the process of interpreting directives, errors of understanding can occur. As with "Chinese whispers", how different parties construe meaning can result in renditions that veer away from original intentions. In addition, where policy directives are less popular, disengagement and indifference can obstruct effective outcomes. Thus it becomes important that actions and objectives work in concert, although alignment of understanding alone may not be enough. We offer some recommendations that may help this to happen.

First, we point to the need for effective change management. While the drivers for change have emerged from more recent governmental directives, there is a potential for inadequate cohesion within the change process. When national structural changes are publicly visible and institutional goals and objectives are openly articulated, individuals are more likely to understand and engage with change requirements. In New Zealand, sector strategy is communicated through the government's Tertiary Education Strategy (TES), while institutional goals are communicated to the Tertiary Education Commission through triennial investment plans that are required to align with the TES. The latter may or may not be well communicated to employees and their realisation is operationalised through various devolved structural and procedural mechanisms. However, there is often less consistency of approach within the institution itself, especially when executive bodies resort to repeated institutional reinventions to address changing external expectations. In many cases, individuals may experience incentives that exist uncomfortably alongside pressures to be accountable and management policies that tie promotion to individual productivity.

At each level of goal and strategy setting, be it national or institutional, there are indications that gaps exist between messages sent and messages received. In other words, to borrow and adapt descriptors from the work of Argyris and Schön (1974) who examined the theory of action, there are
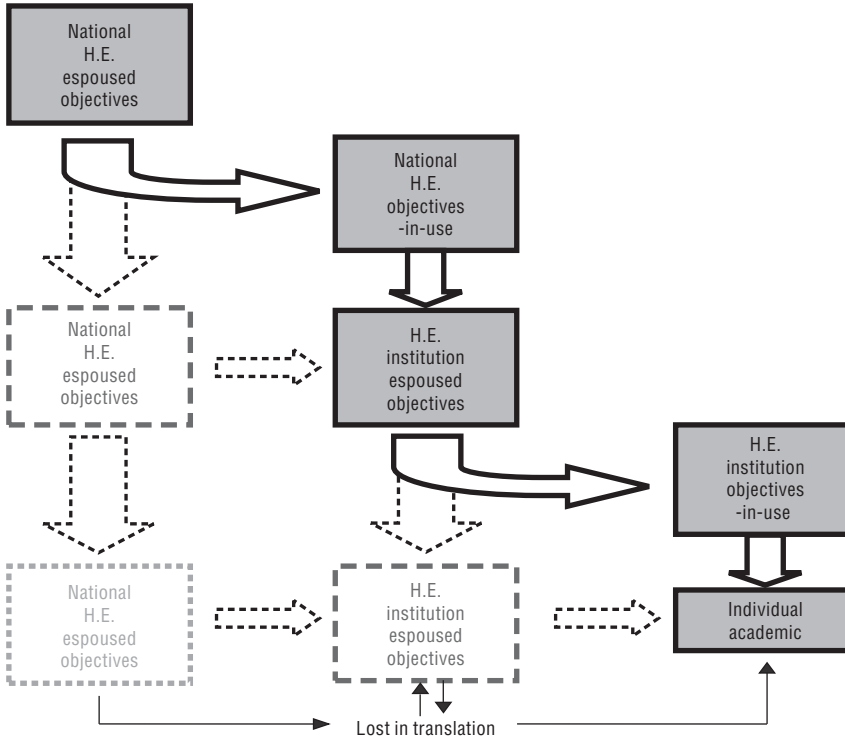
"espoused" objectives and "objectives-in-use". Through their studies, Argyris and Schön found that the theories that people espoused were not the same as the theory that they used. In her critique of their work, Greenwood (1993) explained further that "espoused theories are theories of action to which practitioners claim allegiance and which they communicate deliberately to others; in contrast, theories-in-use are the theories which actually govern and issue in practice". Here, we have deliberately re-framed those terms to refer to the failure for organisational and management practices to resonate clearly with what the organisation advocates. So, in this context, we identify **espoused** objectives as those objectives that an organisation **says** it will achieve and which are usually documented in some form. Objectives-in-use, on the other hand, are what the organisation is **perceived to be seeking** to achieve from its own actions. The smaller the differential between these two aspects of purpose, the more likely that all parties can work collectively.

For the state, the espoused objective of the PBRF is one of encouraging and rewarding research excellence in New Zealand. However, the state's objectives-in-use have the PBRF perceived as a funding mechanism that requires institutions to regularly increase their research performance to prevent a loss of research funding from the state. In addition, individual research outputs are assessed by quality and quantity. It has been observed anecdotally that, within some institutions, research outputs tend to rise in the period leading up to the assessment date, after which they decrease. In other words, staff comply with achieving outputs demanded by external requirements rather than professional and academic needs. At the organisational level, institutions articulate goals encouraging research to support teaching and institutional development, while staff perceive institutional objectives-in-use to be focused on generating more publications and greater research income without allocated time or resourcing. In this regard, Mintrom (2008, p. 234) identifies the need for the institution to develop effective processes for **transforming** research inputs (such as staff endeavours) into increased research quality and research productivity. In order to achieve this outcome, he suggests the creation of an "organisational climate in which research activity is continually exciting" and appropriately supported.

The relationship between the initial espoused objectives of national policy and the institutional objectives-in-use perceived by the individual academic are illustrated in Figure 1.

The potential for the national message to be "lost in translation" by the time it reaches the ear of the staff member is amplified at each step by the extent of the dislocation between espoused objectives and objectives-in-use. For example, although the espoused national objective of the new research agenda in New Zealand is one of encouraging and funding excellent research

Figure 1. **Lost in translation: the cumulative dislocation between espoused objectives and objectives-in-use**

(Tertiary Education Commission, 2008), the objective-in-use is seen as one of maximising research productivity for economic gain while minimising growth in higher education expenditure. At an institutional level, the espoused objective may be one of supporting a quality research environment and enhancing the research reputation of the institution, while the objective-in-use is perceived as one of seeking to increase staff research productivity through increased publications without increasing the resources to support this endeavour.

At each stage, perceptions of objectives-in-use are commonly accompanied by cynicism. However, while the institution is bound to state objectives (regardless of the way these are perceived) because they are so tightly attached to funding, individuals within an organisation can, to some extent, withdraw from active engagement in institutional research objectives by redirecting their energy into other academic activity. In this sense they comply with Presthus' (1979) notion of the "indifferent" and, if this group of

staff grows in number, we suggest that an institution's grip on its objectives becomes more tenuous.

In this context, individual academics are questioning their trust in both national and institutional governance (McNay, 2007). Pratt (1998) has already observed that if there is a lack of congruence and complementarity between individuals and their institutions, identifying and working collectively with shared values is likely to be contested. Henkel (2005) noted through her research in the United Kingdom that when research policies are followed at both the national and institutional level, individual academics begin to question their professional identity. At one level they are advised that undertaking research is valuable, but at the same time they are feeling coerced into obtaining research funding in order to fulfil institutional expectations (Billot, 2010). In addition, academics are aggrieved at how avenues of promotion and tenure are being tied to both the quality and the quantity of research outputs, as well as the generation of external funds (Leslie, 2003). Thus the identity of academic professionals is shifting in response to changing roles and responsibilities established by the academics' own institutional and professional community.

While this paper does not seek to examine processes for organisational change, the underlying issues associated with change practices are fundamental to effective outcomes. Rather than setting out to identify the specific elements of managing change, we have explored the alignment of practice between the three sets of stakeholders, namely, national, institutional and individual parties. It appears to be a significant challenge to all parties to achieve reasonable alignment of governmental, institutional and individual expectations. In fact, it is likely that no one party will take responsibility for this integration. Academics appreciate collegiality, academic freedom and collaboration, especially with management (Winter, 2009), so where there is less constancy of these expectations – such as when interactions between national policy and institutional responses destabilise traditional roles – the result can be insecurity or, as Silver (2003, p. 162) noted, even "bitterness". Management of staff insecurity, therefore, is an integral part of managing institutional change, yet there is a possible inadequate connection made between the change to the organisation and the follow-on effect to individual staff members. In addition, since individuals' behaviour is guided by their perceptions and experiences (Thornton and Jaeger, 2007), staff members need to have their voice heard and acknowledged. These circumstances inevitably have implications for leadership.

In order to provide some support for negotiating the leadership terrain, we identify here some relevant components of practice that might act as cornerstones for strategy implementation and effective research productivity. Since national policy drives the subsequent reactions by institutions and

individuals, tension can be reduced when espoused objectives resonate more clearly with those objectives that are put into action. When this resonance exists, there is a clearer environment in which the institution can take up the directives and operate positively.

At the institutional level, not only do espoused objectives and objectives-in-use need to resonate and provide transparency for institutional strategy, but the institution also needs to address fundamental issues of fairness, honesty, communications and support to embed the changes this strategy requires. Figure 2 illustrates these components which, when used collectively, can promote a research environment that encourages staff engagement.

Figure 2. **A model for the translation of government policy into effective individual practice**
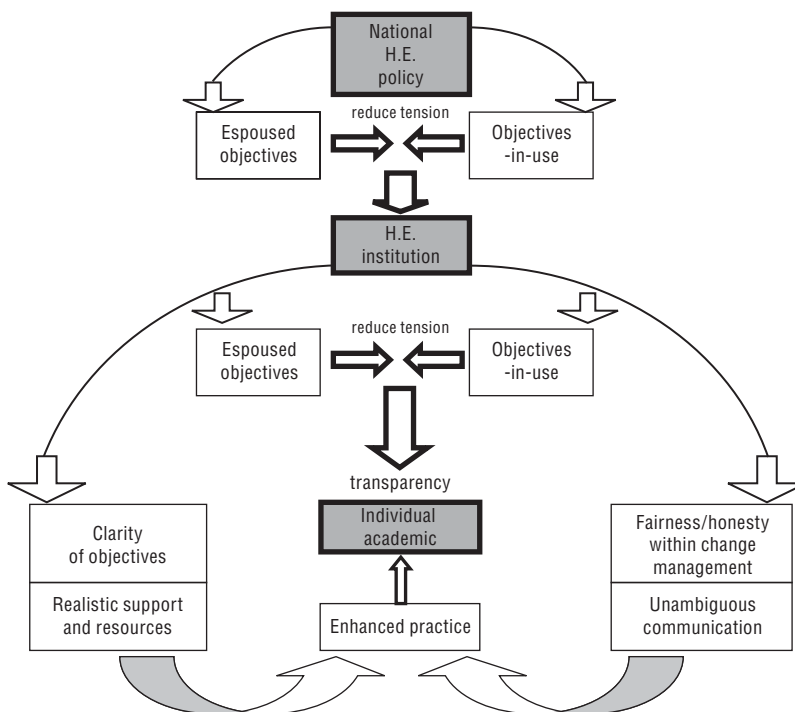
Transparency of both national and institutional purpose needs to be clearly linked to strategies for objectives-in-use. Where espoused objectives and actions do not resonate, tensions can arise, reducing the positive understandings and connections between parties. Channels of communication need to be accessible and content of communication should echo the changed management directives and practices. In addition, the

institution needs to develop a supportive research environment with espoused support being reflected by actual support mechanisms and resources. If it appears that the institutional focus on research productivity remains at the level of "production" there is a missed opportunity to enhance output while also harvesting the motivation, creativity and ability of academic staff. Also, if staff perceive that they are viewed purely as a **unit** of production, their engagement will lack an energised response. Therefore, the perception of how an institution values its academic staff is crucial. If the institutional identity is collectively advanced it is more likely that academics will view the entity and its objectives as "us" and "ours" rather than "it" which will in turn avoid a potential professional divide between the academic manager and the managed academic (Winter, 2009).

Conclusion

In this paper we have utilised some of the issues that underpin the future development of higher education research, using the New Zealand experience as our primary source of illustration, while recognising that this illustration is applicable to other international contexts. We have concentrated on how the stakeholders relate to each other and the consequences of misalignment of expectations and practice. Fruitful interactions are more likely to result in positive outcomes for all, avoiding further erosion of the traditionally accepted notion of academic autonomy and capability (Harris, 2005). Certainly, alignment of mission and performance remains a challenging objective and has significant implications for organisational leadership. It is time for greater reflection on the reshaping of the higher education enterprise. Institutions are unwieldy to steer, yet greater caution and attention needs to be given to any planned change since it involves people as well as processes. As Mintrom (2008, p. 240) pointed out, "organisational culture and staff morale matter greatly". It is crucial that staff perceptions of institutional objectives-in-use are the same as, or very nearly the same as, the institution's espoused objectives. Transparency and openness in communication are fundamental to this.

As Gumport (2001) noted, there are compelling reasons for prioritising integrity: poor decisions of communication and resourcing can result in stratification of who and what matters. This paper has, we trust, laid a foundation for further discussion and will stimulate debate on the issues that affect how higher education research is funded and produced, as well as the significant implications for research leadership.

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