

**Exploring the challenges of managing blended learning courses in selected Irish higher education institutes: An activity theory study.**



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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

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Signature .....

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Doctor of Philosophy, September, 2018

## **Abstract**

This research explores the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses in three higher education institutes (HEIs) in Ireland. Taking a case study approach and utilising Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), more specifically Engeström's (2015) activity systems model (ASM), the research seeks to highlight the challenges by identifying contradictions in the activity systems for developing and delivering blended learning in each of the three HEIs. Three cases are examined by compiling separate ASMs for each case that reveal three quite different management approaches. A typology of managing course development is devised and presented as a means for comparing different approaches to managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses. The contradictions in each of the ASMs are used to identify the challenges associated with each separate approach. The activity systems identified, and their corresponding contradictions, are used to illuminate the larger debate around the use of new managerialist techniques in higher education and what that can mean for collegiality and the emergence of what has been described as neo collegiality in higher education.

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## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Publications derived from work on the Doctoral Programme</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Prologue</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.1 International and national context</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Research need and importance</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 Research questions</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 2 Exploring the management of blended learning courses: collegiality, new managerialism and CHAT</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1 HEI management through the discourse of collegiality and new managerialism</b> .....	<b>10</b>
2.1.1 Literature selection and review procedure.....	11
2.1.2 The Themes.....	13
2.1.3 The contribution to knowledge in the collegiality-new managerialism debate	22
<b>2.2 The Management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses</b> .....	<b>23</b>
2.2.1 Literature selection and review procedure .....	24
2.2.2 The Themes.....	25
2.2.3 The contribution to knowledge in the field of managing blended learning courses and the link to collegiality—new managerialism debate .....	46
<b>2.3 Activity Theory and the study of organisational behaviour in HE</b> .....	<b>47</b>
2.3.1 Literature selection and review procedure .....	48
2.3.2 The Themes.....	50
2.3.3 Activity System terminology: definitions and contestations.....	64
2.3.4 The contribution to knowledge in the field of activity theory and ASM.....	68
<b>2.4 Synthesised messages from the literature review</b> .....	<b>69</b>

---



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<b>Chapter 3 Methodology</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<b>3.1 Defining Methodology</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<b>3.2 The type of study: methodologies considered</b> .....	<b>71</b>
3.2.1 Change Theories.....	71
3.2.2 Design Based Research .....	72
3.2.3 Action Research.....	72
3.2.4 A multiple case study approach: adopted for this study.....	73
<b>3.3 A brief overview of the research design</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>3.4 The relationship between the research design and the research aims...</b>	<b>74</b>
3.4.1 ASM and AODM .....	77
<b>3.5 Choice of cases: study context</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>3.6 ASM analysis data collection methods</b> .....	<b>81</b>
3.6.1 Sampling strategy and participants .....	83
3.6.2 CHAT ASM Interviews .....	84
<b>3.7 Data analysis</b> .....	<b>86</b>
<b>3.8 Ontological and epistemological issues: Pragmatism</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>3.9 Ethical Issues</b> .....	<b>92</b>
<b>Chapter 4 Presenting the Data and Data Analysis</b> .....	<b>95</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>95</b>
<b>4.2 Definitions</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>4.3 HEI A</b> .....	<b>99</b>
4.3.1 Description of HEI A's BLAS.....	100
4.3.2 Contradictions .....	116
<b>4.4 HEI B</b> .....	<b>129</b>
4.4.1 Description of HEI B's BLAS.....	129
4.4.2 Contradictions .....	149
<b>4.5 HEI C</b> .....	<b>160</b>
4.5.1 Description of HEI C's BLAS.....	161
4.5.2 Contradictions .....	178
<b>Overview of Findings</b> .....	<b>187</b>
4.6.1 Commonalities.....	187
4.6.2 Distinguishing aspects.....	189
<b>Chapter 5 Discussion</b> .....	<b>192</b>
<b>5.1 How are blended learning courses managed as ASMs in selected Irish HEIs?</b>	<b>192</b>

---

5.2	What are the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses as identified as contradictions in the analysis of the three ASMs? .....	193
5.3	What possible resolutions and implications for managing blended learning course development and delivery in the future can be concluded?... 196	
5.4	How do the responses to these contradictions, as seen in changes to HEI practices, structures and staff relationships, inform the debate about new managerialism and collegiality in HE?.....	197
5.5	What new understandings of CHAT as a theoretical framework can be garnered from applying the ASM to blended learning course management in HE? 200	
5.6	Limitations.....	202
5.7	Further research.....	203
<b>Chapter 6 Conclusion.....</b>		<b>205</b>
6.1	Key findings and significance of the study .....	205
6.2	Reflections on the literature review .....	207
6.3	Implications for practitioners .....	209
6.4	Final Comments .....	210
<b>References .....</b>		<b>211</b>
<b>Appendix One: Articles on Blended Learning Models and Case Studies .....</b>		<b>238</b>
<b>Appendix Two: Explanation of the Attributes and Elements of the Blended Learning Management Typology.....</b>		<b>244</b>
<b>Appendix Three: Ethics Documents .....</b>		<b>246</b>
Consent Form.....		246
Participant Information Sheet .....		247
<b>Appendix Four: Interview Questions .....</b>		<b>250</b>

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Máire, and my daughters, Caoimhe and Daisy. To say what follows could not have taken place without their support and patience is a huge understatement.

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## **Publications derived from work on the Doctoral Programme**

Murphy, Tony (2017). The future of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) is in the hands of the anonymous, grey non-descript mid-level professional manager. *Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*. 2(1) 1-9.  
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## List of abbreviations

AODM	Activity-Oriented Design Method
ASM	Activity Systems Model
BLAS	Blended Learning Activity System
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
DBR	Design Based Research
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority, Ireland
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HoD	Head of Department
IUA	Irish Universities Association, Ireland
LASO	Leadership, Academic & Student Ownership and Readiness
LMS	Learning Management System
NFTL	National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
Q&A	Quality and Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
T&L	Teaching and Learning
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
THEA	Technological Higher Education Association, Ireland
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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## List of Figures and Tables

<b>Tables</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table 2.1 HE Management Search Terms	10
Table 2.2 HE Management Search Results	12
Table 2.3 Managing Blended Learning Search Terms	23
Table 2.4 Managing Blended Learning Search Results	24
Table 2.5 Blended Learning Course Management Attributes	36/95
Table 2.6 Attributes in the Blended Learning Management Typology	38
Table 2.7 Attributes in the Blended Learning Management Typology	39
Table 2.8 Cases and Models Led by Academics	40
Table 2.9 Cases and Models Organised on a Distributed basis	41
Table 2.10 Cases and Models Led by Manager/Administrator	42
Table 2.11 Cases and Models Driven from Top Down	42
Table 2.12 Blended learning management typology through new managerialist-collegiality lens	43
Table 2.13 Models and Cases led by the lecturer	44
Table 2.14 Models and Cases driven from the top-down	44
Table 2.15 Models and Cases with a staff dynamic of Academics with Support	45
Table 2.16 Most frequently occurring attributes	45
Table 2.17 Blended learning management through a new-managerial— collegial—neo collegial lens	46
Table 2.18 Activity Theory Search Terms	48
Table 2.19 Activity Theory Search Results	49
Table 2.20 Elements of the ASM Defined	53
Table 3.1 Research Questions, Methods and Analysis	76
Table 3.2 Eight Step Model	85
Table 3.3 Types of Discursive Manifestations of Contradictions	87
Table 4.1 Manifestation of contradictions	96
Table 4.2 Blended learning development and delivery terminology	98
Table 4.3 ASM elements compared	188

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Table 4.4	Contradictions compared	189
Table 5.1	Categories of Professional Identity	199

## **Figures**

Fig. 2.1	Blended Learning Course Management Scale	29
Fig. 2.2	Activity Systems Model	51
Fig. 3.1	Activity Systems Model	77
Fig. 4.1	BLAS for HEI A	100
Fig. 4.2	ASM of HEI A's Course Approval Process	125
Fig. 4.3	Summary of Contradictions in HEI A's BLAS	128
Fig. 4.4	BLAS for HEI B	129
Fig. 4.5	ASM of HEI B's Review of Programmes	156
Fig. 4.6	Summary of Contradictions in HEI B's BLAS	159
Fig. 4.7	BLAS for HEI C	161
Fig. 4.8	ASM of HEI C's Course Approval Process	183
Fig. 4.9	Summary of Contradictions in HEI C's BLAS	186

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## Prologue

The desire to pursue this research emerged from my experience of working on the development of blended learning courses first as a Systems Librarian and then as an E-Learning Projects Coordinator at an Irish Higher Education Institute (HEI). During this time, I witnessed what I understood to be an ongoing culture clash within the HE sector that has had an adverse effect on the sector's ability to facilitate learning. This clash appeared to me to be between an academic culture and a culture that promoted operational efficiency and effectiveness. The adverse effects of this clash were also apparent to me during the three occasions in the past 20 years when I have been a postgraduate student at three different HEIs in Ireland. What attracted me initially to online education was a suspicion that, along with the potential to provide a more rewarding and diverse learning environment to many students who otherwise might not have the opportunity of attending a HEI, online education might also offer further insight into the culture clash that I had been witnessing. The use of digital education technology appeared to be forcing HEIs to think about how and why they functioned the way they did; "the virtual university is . . . the university made concrete?" (Cornford, 2000). Becoming involved in developing and delivering blended learning, I started to be able to better understand and articulate this culture clash. It appeared that, in trying to support the implementation of blended learning courses, I was getting a sense of helping to expose and highlight what was not working in the operations behind facilitating learning in a HEI, however, I remained unable to articulate what it was about blended learning that was exposing these issues. Therefore, on a personal level, this research is an effort to see if the management of blended learning course development and delivery exposes the root issues behind the cultural clash I had been experiencing. If that is the case, the research will be able to offer some direction for the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses and for lessening the adverse effects of clashing management cultures on the sector's ability to facilitate learning.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 International and national context

There is an international and national context within which blended learning courses are being developed in Irish HEIs. The European Union (EU) has been promoting the development of blended learning courses within the context of encouraging member states to move toward a more flexible teaching and learning environment. Under Education 2020, the EU's framework for co-operation on Education and Training, one of the four common objectives highlighted was that "40% of those aged 30-34 should have a higher education or equivalent qualification by 2020" (European Commission, 2010 p. 11). In order to achieve this and other objectives, a number of benchmarks and priority areas were identified. One of the priority areas was digital technology in education, which was seen as being key to increased open and flexible learning, which in itself was seen as key to achieving the 40% higher education qualification objective noted above. The importance of digital technology in education was reflected in *An agenda for the Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education Systems* (European Commission, 2011) which identified key policy issues for Member States and HEIs that want to best support Europe's growth and jobs, and the specific actions that the EU plans in order to support the modernisation efforts at national level. Among the key policy issues for member states and HEIs from this agenda are: "To encourage a greater variety of study modes (e.g. part-time, distance and modular learning, continuing education for adult returners and others already in the labour market) [and to] better exploit the potential of ICTs to enable more effective and personalised learning experiences, teaching and research methods (e.g. eLearning and blended learning) and increase the use of virtual learning platforms" (p. 7).

The High-Level Group that authored the agenda for the modernisation of higher education in Europe also acknowledged the challenges to moving to a more flexible teaching and learning environment in its *Report to the European Commission on New modes of learning and teaching in higher education*

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(European Commission, 2014). The group called for a change in the culture of conservatism in higher education and challenged public authorities to consider how the learning opportunities afforded by new models of provision can be more fully integrated. Among its recommendations was a call for the EU to support efforts at a national level to develop and implement “comprehensive national frameworks for diversifying provision and integrating new modes of learning” (European Commission, 2014 p. 24). Moreover, the report recommended that national guidelines should be developed for “ensuring quality in open and online learning, and to promote excellence in the use of ICT in higher education provision” (European Commission, 2014 p.41).

The direction being taken by the EU toward flexible teaching and learning was reflected in Ireland by the *Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES, 2011). This so-called Hunt report noted that, in the future, there would be increasing demand for higher education opportunities that would require an increase in flexible learning opportunities, part-time, work-based learning and short intensive skills programmes. The report noted the potential offered by digital technologies in helping to facilitate that move to a more flexible delivery program. What the report also noted, however, was the inflexibility in the current system and the administrative and institutional challenges that the drive for a more flexible and open learning environment creates. This view is echoed by Devine (2015) who noted the concern expressed regarding “inbuilt rigidities in the system,” which are seen as driving “institutional behaviours, but not in a way that supports flexibility for students or develops the aspirations for the diversity espoused in the National Strategy for HE” (p. 17). The drive toward more flexible learning environments supported by digital teaching and learning was also reflected in the Irish Higher Education Authority’s (HEA) *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-2016’s* (HEA, 2014a) key objective 2.3, which called for “increased numbers and proportions of entrants into flexible learning opportunities in higher education” (p. 5), and the subsequent *Mission Based Performance Compacts 2014-2016* (HEA, 2017) between the HEA and Irish HEIs. Under the compact section 5.2, Participation, equal access and lifelong learning, and/or section

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5.3 Excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience, most HEIs made commitments to achieve targets that would reflect their commitment to digital teaching and learning. Some HEIs made specific commitments to the development of blended learning courses, offering detailed targets for the number of blended learning students and/or blended learning courses to be achieved by 2016. The move toward blended learning courses in Ireland is also seen in the Irish Quality and Qualifications Institute's (QQI) consultation process over its *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Flexible and Distributed Learning (White Paper)* (QQI, 2015). It is understood that what emerged from that consultation process is a set of guidelines specifically on blended learning courses, which have been forwarded to HEIs for consultation (QQI, 2017). At both an EU and Irish national level, there appears to be a drive to develop blended learning courses, which is seen as a factor in encouraging a more flexible learning environment.

## **1.2 Research need and importance**

In this section, the argument is made that this research is original and necessary because more insights and studies are needed on how HEIs manage technologically mediated teaching and learning, such as through blended learning courses. There is a scarcity of studies on blended course management, especially from the perspectives of collegiality and new managerialism. Moreover, there is a lack of studies that utilise CHAT as a theoretical framework to analyse the complex processes of managing blended learning course development and delivery in HEIs.

It has been suggested that digital technology poses a challenge to how HEIs operate (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011; Marshall, 2010; Rossiter, 2007; Salmon, 2005). One of the ways in which digital technology has become a reality for HEIs is through the emergence of blended learning courses, which are defined by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) as “the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences” (p. 5). The challenges posed by digital technology, in the form of blended learning, come at a time when there is also a challenge to the management of publicly funded

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HEIs by the introduction of more corporate business-like practices (Burnes, Wend & Todnem By, 2013; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007; Halfman & Leydesdorff, 2010; Trowler, 2010). Some have even suggested that the introduction of digital technology is helping the HE sector to become more corporate (Cornford, 2000). Either way, the consequence of the dual challenges of digital technology and more corporate business practices is that many HEIs are asking some fundamental questions about how and why they operate the way they do.

The challenges posed by blended learning are multifaceted. Blended learning, can be very demanding for academics (Hillman & Corkery, 2010; Torrisi-Steele & Drew, 2013), as they find themselves under pressure to expand their knowledge of digital technology and its implications for the teaching and learning environment. The team-based approach to online and blended learning development and delivery promoted by several authors (Bass, 2012; Bates, 2014; Carbonell, Dailey-Hebert & Gijsselaers, 2012; Garrison & Vaughan, 2012; Hillman & Corkery 2010; Taylor & Newton, 2012; Vasser, 2010), challenges the traditional authority (Bass, 2012) and academic identity (Hanson, 2009) of lecturers. Blended learning and other forms of online education also challenge the norms, structures, processes, hierarchy, views, perspective and understanding of the HEI (Jones & O'Shea, 2004). In addition, there are legal questions (Jones & O'Shea, 2004), infrastructural demands (Hillman & Corkery, 2010), the incentivisation of staff to participate (Hanson 2009; Graham, Woodfield & Harrison 2012) and the decision to take a centralised or decentralised faculty-based approach (Carbonel et al., 2012; Chew, 2009; Moskal, Dziuban & Hartman, 2013). Bass (2012) claims that "the power of innovation in the co-curriculum and flexible learning, particularly afforded by the internet, are making colleges and universities run headlong into their own structures" (p. 24).

There is a wealth of guides and models for implementing blended learning in HEIs (Ari & Taplamacioglu, 2012; Bates, 2000; Davis & Fill, 2007; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Graham, et al., 2012; Moskal, et al., 2013; Niemiec & Otte,



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2010; Sharpe, Benfield & Francis, 2006; Stacey & Gerbic, 2008; Torrisi-Steele & Drew, 2013). A number of case studies of blended learning implementation (Graham, et al., 2012; Garrison and Vaughan, 2012; Taylor & Newton, 2012) can also be found in the literature. However, there is an absence of in-depth detailed studies that explore the complexity of how the development and delivery of blended learning courses are actually managed.

Much of the recent literature on management in HEIs has been dominated by the debate over collegiality and 'new managerialism' (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Lynch, Grummell, & Devine, 2011; Ramirez & Tiplic, 2013; Stensaker, Välimaa, Henkel & Sarrico, 2012; Tight, 2014; Trowler 2010). Collegiality refers to the idea that decisions in HEIs are made collectively by academics (Tight, 2014). Collegial HEI's are also identified as being decentralised arenas of cooperation, where the emphasis is on academic freedom (Sahlin, 2012) and the idea that activities or cultures are managed would be seen as "heretical" (Deem, 1998, p. 47). New managerialism refers to the idea that decisions are made by managers, with little input from anyone else (Tight, 2014). Trowler (2010) outlines the characteristics of new managerialism as including devolved budgets, quality assurance, league tables, research decisions determined by funding and not academic value and increased workloads. It has been argued that the HE sector in the UK, and further afield, has spent the past 30 years going through a transition whereby new managerialism has come to be imposed on the sector (Deem, 1998; Halfman & Leydesdorff, 2010; Trowler, 2010; Burnes, et al., 2013). A discussion of the management of blended learning courses would have to be seen in the context of this clash of collegiality and new managerialism.

In terms of theoretical and analytical models to explore the management of blended learning courses, CHAT seems to be best suited since it clearly focuses analytical attention on contradictions within organisational behaviour. CHAT has evolved into an influential analytical framework for research into professional learning and work practices, particularly through the work of Yrjö Engeström and his Activity Systems Model (ASM) (Warmington, 2011). The

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ASM, which is a theoretical framework focused on exposing contradictions and conflicts in an activity, has been used to assess such complex phenomenon as knowledge sharing (Mwanza, 2002), human-computer interaction (Kuutti, 1995) and strategic practices (Jarzabkowski, 2003). It has been argued that the ASM offers a broad lens of inquiry that encompasses various aspects of the educational setting (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2013). Unsurprisingly, the ASM has been used in organisational studies of HEI's to, among other areas, assess the interfaces between e-learning and the macro and micro organisational levels in higher education (Benson, Lawler & Whitworth, 2008) and as a framework for "negotiating the form that sustainable e-learning might take" (Robertson, 2008 p. 218) in a HEI. The ASM has not been used to undertake an in-depth analysis of the complexity of managing a blended learning course, however, within the context of the collegiality-new managerialism debate in HE.

Given the importance of blended learning to the national and EU goals of a more flexible learning environment, there is a scarcity of research offering deeper insights into how the development and delivery of blended learning courses are managed. In particular, there is a scarcity of studies that explore blended learning courses as complex activity systems informed by activity theory. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on viewing the complexity of managing blended learning within the context of the wider management debate over collegiality and new managerialism.

### **1.3 Research questions**

Therefore, it would appear that there is a scarcity of research offering deeper insights into how the development and delivery of blended learning courses are managed. In particular, there is a scarcity of studies that explore blended learning courses as complex activity systems informed by activity theory. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on viewing the complexity of managing blended learning within the context of the wider management debate over collegiality and new managerialism. This research seeks to address this scarcity by exploring the way in which selected HEIs are tackling

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the complex processes of managing blended learning courses at three Irish HEIs using CHAT. Doing so offers the opportunity to explore the response to the complex impact of the dual challenge of digital technology and corporate management practices in the HE sector. It is appropriate that such an exploration focusses on the management of blended learning courses aimed at work-based, part-time learners, given that this cohort of students is most closely associated with the need for the flexible learning environment prioritised at national and EU level. The questions to guide this research are:

1. How are blended learning courses managed as ASMs in selected Irish HEIs?
2. What are the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses as identified as contradictions in the analysis of the three ASMs?
3. What possible resolutions and implications for managing blended learning course development and delivery in the future can be concluded?
4. How do the responses to these contradictions, as seen in changes to HEI practices, structures and staff relationships, inform the debate about new managerialism and collegiality in HE?
5. What new understandings of CHAT as a theoretical framework can be garnered from applying the ASM to blended learning course management in HE?

Given these research questions, the literature review specifically focuses on

1. Management practices and management of HEIs through the discourse of collegiality and new managerialism
2. The management of blended learning courses
3. The use of activity theory, and specifically the ASM, as a theoretical framework for studying organisational behaviour in a HE context

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## **Chapter 2 Exploring the management of blended learning courses: collegiality, new managerialism and CHAT**

The approach to the literature review was to break down the research topic into the three areas identified at the end of section 1.3 and to take a systematic approach to searching for and assessing relevant literature in each of the three areas, before synthesising the review findings at the end of the section.

The review itself involves three main tasks:

- searching for relevant research
- critically appraising it in a systematic manner
- synthesising the findings by bringing them together to form a coherent statement (Gough & Thomas, 2012)

A starting point in searching for relevant literature was to determine the scope of the search and resources available. A useful first step in determining the scope of the review is a reference interview (Cassell & Hiremath, 2012). The interview took the form of a series of closed and open questions, the answers to which define the limits of the subject and help to fully cover the extent of the subject within those limits.

The closed questions—How far back should the search go? Are there any geographical and language preferences? Which formats should be included? At what level of academic standard should the material be?—place limits on the search. The answers to the open-ended questions—Why are you interested in this subject? Describe the subject in layman's terms? What alternative keywords and phrases are used to define your subject?—are aimed at helping to break down the subject into distinctive topics while also producing a collection of relevant keywords and key phrases that form the ammunition for the search.

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## 2.1 HEI management through the discourse of collegiality and new managerialism

In the case of the first area, the following topics were identified:

- Collegiality
- New managerialism
- Higher Education
- Management

Alternative keywords and phrases for each of the above topics that emerged from the reference interview are listed in table 2.1.

Keyword / Phrases	management	"higher education"	"middle management"
Alternatives	Collegiality	"third level"	dean
	"new managerialism"	tertiary	"head of department"
	"new public management"	post-secondary	"head of faculty"
	NPM	university	
		college	
		non-compulsory	

Table 2.1. HE Management Search Terms

The following string, which was created by placing Boolean operator OR between the words in a column and Boolean operator AND in between collection of words in the rows, was used as the basis for the search.

(collegiality OR NPM OR "New Public Management" OR managerialism) AND ("Higher Education" OR "third level" OR tertiary OR college OR university OR post-secondary OR non-compulsory) AND ("middle management" OR dean OR "head of department" OR "head of faculty")

The search was limited by the following criteria:

- Material published in the last ten years
- Peer reviewed with references available
- English language
- Full text available

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The rationale for restricting the search initially to the last ten years is that the question of new managerialism and collegiality appears to have dominated the literature on management in HEIs in recent times (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Ramirez & Tiplic, 2013; Stensaker et al., 2012). The year 2005 also marked the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Jarret Report* which is taken by some commentators (Burnes et al., 2014) as the starting point for the centralisation of universities in the UK. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication appears to have generated a renewed discussion of the validity of new managerialism and collegiality that has seen considerable material published on the subject in the past ten years. Material published prior to 2005 was considered as part of this review, by including references to citations listed in the post-2005 material recovered.

#### 2.1.1 Literature selection and review procedure

The searches took place over a three-day period 9-11/11/15. The search string was applied to online resources listed on Lancaster University Library's Educational Research subject guide. Where possible, all searches were carried out on the abstract field. The search string above formed the basis for searches but was changed for some of the resources, such as Science Direct and Google Scholar, which do not accommodate multi-faceted search strings on the abstract field. The results are listed in Table 2.2.

<b>Management in Higher Education</b>			
Field	Abstract		
Currency	10 Years		
Standard	Peer Reviewed		
Language	English		
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Engine</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Title/Abstract Review</b>
Academic Search Complete	EBSCOHost	33	7
British Education Index			
PsychArticles			
PsychINFO			
ERIC			
Google Scholar		463	38
ABI Inform		7	4
JSPTR		103	10
Project MUSE Journals		116	13
Web of Science		8	2
Science Direct		12	2
Taylor and Francis		17	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>759</b>	<b>83</b>

Table 2.2. HE Management Search Results

### 2.1.1.1 Critical appraisal

The abstracts and titles of the results were scanned for relevance and the results were reduced by asking whether or not the results were:

- too discipline specific
- genuinely about management practice
- too focused on academic identity/practice/role
- duplicates
- examined middle management

During this initial analysis of the abstracts, themes started to emerge. These themes informed a fuller reading of the selected literature that survived the abstract and title review.

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### 2.1.1.2 Synthesising

A second and third reading allowed for a synthesis of what was emerging from the literature to take place. A narrative synthesis was adopted, which is defined as taking a textual approach to the process of synthesis to ‘tell the story’ of the findings from the research retrieved, according to Popay et al. (2006), who argue that narrative synthesis is appropriate where the material recovered includes so many research designs as to prevent synthesis based on research methodology and where the subjects covered by the material retrieved are not sufficiently similar to allow for the use of a specialist synthesis. Additional readings of the material retrieved focused on the findings and conclusions of the articles and book chapters, and during these subsequent readings themes emerged, merged and developed.

### 2.1.2 The Themes

Initially, what emerged from the literature review was this very clear sense that collegiality and new managerialism was a dichotomy. The characteristics of both approaches seemed to bear that out, no more obviously than when looking at the impact on academic staff of trying to perform while being pulled in apparently opposite directions. There is the alternative view, however, that appears to be gaining traction in the literature, which suggests that there is no dichotomy and that a compromise is possible, in the form of neo-collegiality. The third theme that emerged focusses on the key role that middle managers in HEIs appear to have in making this compromise, if it is possible, work.

#### 2.1.2.1 A Dichotomy of collegiality and new managerialism

The first theme to emerge is the idea that collegiality and new managerialism are two sides of a dichotomy, in that the two approaches are mutually exclusive, opposed and contradictory. The extent to which this dichotomy is substantive can be explored by looking at it in terms of:

- Definition
- Accountability and Structure
- Impact on academic staff



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### 2.1.2.1.1 Definition

Collegiality, in its most basic sense, refers to a method of decision-making (Burnes et al., 2014). Collegiality constitutes a structured form of collaborative decision-making that recognises the value of participation in decisions about how a HEI works and what its purpose is (Bacon, 2014; Burnes et al., 2014; Huisman, de Boer, & Goedegebuure, 2006). In contrast, new managerialism refers to the belief that the most important decisions in organisations are made by managers almost independently of other employees (Teelken, 2012). With new managerialism, participatory decisions previously made by subject-based senates of academics are made by senior management teams, with academic managers turning into line-managers (Bacon, 2014; Dowling-Hetherington, 2013)

Looking at a broader definition, new managerialism refers to a management ideology (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Meek, Goedegebuure, Santiago, & Carvalho, 2010) that draws on the principles of neo-liberalism (Meek et al., 2010). New Public Management (NPM) is used to define the practical manifestation of new managerialism; practices brought in from the corporate world and based on competition, decentralisation and efficiency (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010; Deem & Brehony, 2005) that include privatisation, downsizing and outsourcing, budget diversification, benchmarking, performance appraisal and quality assurance (Meek et al., 2010).

The application of NPM has been a feature of Anglo-American public services since the early 1980s (Alford & Hughes, 2008) and, it has been argued, the basis of the global trend in higher education management reform (Meek et al., 2010). In Ireland, O'Connor & White (2011) claim that the university system is still in transition from collegiality to new managerialism. However, Lynch et al. (2012) argue a historical basis for new managerialism in Ireland dating back to the 1965 OECD influenced *Investment in Education* report advising a move toward education for the marketplace, which they claim became the focus of government policy for the next 30 years.

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The specificity and clarity of even a broad definition of new managerialism is in stark contrast to a broad definition of collegiality, which is quite elusive (Caesar, 2005; Weinberg & Graham-Smith, 2012). For the purposes of this review, collegiality is used to refer to the manifestation of the collegial tradition in different national HEI sectors as opposed to the collegiality as understood in the collegial universities (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). This collegial tradition is seen to a large extent as intrinsic to any institution that wants to refer to itself as a university (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). While difficult to define, it would appear that integral to the collegial tradition is this idea that “nothing can be achieved unless it has the formal blessing of the collective membership” (Tapper & Palfreyman, 1998, p.145). The concept of collective governing is far removed from the neo-liberal influenced governing of new managerialism. The contrast between the two management cultures is also reflected in the different approaches to governance and structure.

#### **2.1.2.1.2 Governance and structure**

A collegiate or traditional HEI tends to be independent from government or other state bodies (Hedley, 2010; Trowler, 2010). Self-credentialing, the collegiate HEI does not look to outside organisations for validation or quality control. HEI departments, the manifestation of the disciplines, hold significant organisational sway (Trowler, 2010), with academics within the department making a structured form of collaborative decisions (Bacon, 2014; Burnes et al., 2014) and assuming autonomy even from internal management (Elton, 1995).

For new managerialism, the tendency is to look externally for validation and quality control to league tables and state agencies (Hedley, 2010). For example, in Ireland, the 2012 Quality Assurance and Qualifications Act established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), which is “responsible for the external quality assurance of Irish further and higher education and training” (QQI, 2016. p. 1). Internally, new managerialist tendencies drive a unifying of internal governance and management structures and a

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"concentration of power at the top of an administrative hierarchy" (Meek et al., 2010).

Stensaker et al. (2012) note that, with the onset of new managerialism, most of the HE sector has experienced policy initiatives intended to change the structure and the way teaching and research are organised and function. The key aspect of this change has been the centralisation of power away from the academic departments (Alford & Hughes, 2008; Bacon, 2014). With a traditional HEI, the academic discipline-based departments were the main structural features in HE (Trowler, 2010), with academics more likely to act independently of each other, giving their loyalty primarily to their discipline (Elton, 1995). New managerialism, through its practical manifestation, NPM, involves centralising control with "line management autonomy" (Alford & Hughes, 2008, p.135), with the structure of the HEI tending to have a centralised headquarters, with relatively autonomous divisions each responsible for achieving a separate set of results, yet controlling the functions required to achieve those results (Capano & Regini, 2014; Meek et al., 2010). Again, with governance and structure, a dichotomy appears to emerge, whereby there is this contrast in the self-governing independent decentralised loose structure typical of collegiality and the centralised line-managed controlling structures that were introduced with new managerialism.

#### **2.1.2.1.3 Impact on academic staff**

If the advent of new managerialism, as imposed on HEIs by government and state bodies (Capano & Regini, 2014; Carvalho & Santiago, 2010; O'Connor & White, 2011), has led to a dichotomy within HEIs, it would follow that there should be some impact upon how academic staff function and work. With collegiality, the academic staff would be relatively free from management, relatively autonomous in time management and enjoy relatively low teaching loads (Trowler, 2010). Academics could work independently of each other (Elton, 1995; Hedley, 2010; Trowler, 2010), enjoy almost total job security and regard teaching as a private affair (Trowler, 2010), with research funding constrained by only the minimal effort to determine the research agenda

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(Hedley, 2010; Trowler, 2010). The idea behind this academic freedom appears to be that no “culture, tradition, religion or philosophy is sacrosanct” (Weinberg & Graham-Smith, 2012, p.74), as a university should be able to provide protection to research in pursuit of truth and that to constrain such freedom is to harm the integrity of a university (Weinberg & Graham-Smith, 2012).

For academics, however, the implication of new managerialism and NPM is less freedom and autonomy and more structure and monitoring (Kolsaker, 2008). NPM offers a clear move towards standards of performance that can be measured (Teelken, 2012), implying that what is measurable becomes what is valuable. Teaching and research is constantly under review (Hedley, 2010; Teelken, 2012), and the criteria against which achievement is measured can include efficiency and effectiveness (Keating, 2001; Meek et al., 2010); public good, private good, value for money (Hedley, 2010) and client satisfaction (Meek et al., 2010). Being driven by results and the measurement of outputs rather than being guided by a set of rules (Keating, 2001; Meek et al., 2010) skews collegial behaviour (Bacon, 2014), the consequences of which, some argue, has been seen as an identity schism within academia (Winter, 2009). Key to this schism is the idea that there is no ideological or values common ground for academics and management and the purpose of the organisation. Trying to stay collegiate and principled when under pressure to compete brings its own difficulties for academics (Archer, 2008), who can be naturally disinclined to behave as followers given that critical independent thinking is a cornerstone of being an academic (Billot et al., 2013). Academic staff have been noted to engage in anti-managerialist tactics, such as ignoring requests and advice, failing to turn up to meetings and ‘losing’ important documents (Tight, 2014). Returning to the basic division between new managerialism and collegiality—how decisions are made in HEIs—removing staff from having virtually total involvement in decision making to then having almost none in the new managerialist system has been shown to lead to poor decision making, delayed and failed change and the demotivation and de-professionalisation of staff (Burnes et al., 2014).

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This idea that the introduction of new managerialism and the practices of NPM may be causing an identity schism among academic staff further illustrates that collegiality and new managerialism are so distinct and opposite so as to be a true dichotomy.

#### **2.1.2.2 There is compatibility**

Despite the apparent dichotomy outlined above, an alternative theme of compatibility between new managerialism and collegiality also emerged. This compatibility theme is based on the idea that one management approach does not suit all circumstances and demands and that there are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches for the HE sector. What also emerged in support of compatibility is the idea that an organisation, such as a HEI, is sufficiently complex in its purpose and operations to accommodate different management approaches. Moreover, the number of suggested solutions that are being discussed in the literature supports the idea that the two approaches can co-exist or even intertwine to achieve compatibility.

One of the criticisms directed at NPM is that it was put forward as the only viable approach and that it was applicable to all forms of government (Alford & Hughes, 2008), yet it has been unable to generate internal homogeneity (Huisman et al., 2006). Another criticism of NPM is that technological advances that facilitate flatter structures and enable increased autonomy and flexibility (Bacon, 2014) have superseded the hierarchical outdated structures it promotes, which makes NPM less suited to a knowledge-based venture. The so-called golden era of collegiality has also been criticized as promoting elitism (Elton, 1995) and adopting gender-biased practices (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). If, as suggested, collegiality was intended for the few, the resources would never have been there to support collegiality with the increase in student numbers that has taken place over the past 20 years (Elton, 1995; Tight, 2014), suggesting that it is no longer fit for purpose.

Given that both sides of the so-called dichotomy bring with them their own disadvantages, it is not surprising to see reported the idea that neither

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collegiality nor new managerialism have been totally rejected by academics, and that there are many aspects to HEI administration that are not deemed successes for either collegiality or new managerialism (Hedley, 2010). It has been noted that aspects of collegiality continue to survive in the HE sector (Kolsaker, 2008; Nuttall, 2012) and are still regarded as being important for research and teaching to be of a high quality (Sahlin, 2012). Moreover, it would appear that academic decisions continue to be the purview of academics (Kok, Douglas, McClelland, & Bryde, 2010).

Tight (2012) highlights the efforts at resisting new managerialism and NPM by academics but it has also been noted that academics are reshaping their identities to accommodate the change (Kolsaker, 2008). There is recognition among some academics that new managerialism has had a positive effect on performance (Smeenk, Teelken, Eisinga & Doorewaard, 2009) and an acceptance that it can be a “facilitator of improved performance, professionalism and status” (Kolsaker, 2008, p 522). Going a further step in drawing a link between academics and new managerialism, Miller (2014) argues that the individuality of academics has more in common with the values of neo-liberalism and argues for the preservation of academic freedom within a neo-liberal framework.

Therefore, it appears that HEIs can have complex, hybrid models (Hedley, 2010; Kolsaker, 2008) where different approaches exist (Alford & Hughes, 2008). Sahlin (2012) notes when outlining four different approaches to university governance, organisation and management, that these approaches do not follow each other but rather “are institutionalized in the environment and operation of today’s universities” (p. 214). Given that new managerialism is likely to be here for a long time (Santiago, Carvalho, Amaral & Meek, 2006), it has been argued that some form of reconciliation or blending (Burnes et al., 2014; Dearlove, 2002) of the approaches is required where an interdependence between the two identities is acknowledged in that one cannot change without taking into consideration the impact on the other (Winter, 2009).

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#### **2.1.2.2.1 Neo-Collegiality**

One of the suggestions as to why new managerialism has not taken on more of a foothold in the HE sector is that it was implemented without regard for the distinct nature of HEIs as professional autonomous institutions (Teelken, 2012). An alternative approach, neo-collegiality, has been suggested as a mechanism for new managerialism to take into consideration that distinctiveness (Bacon, 2014), while also blending the centralised aspects of new managerialism and the decentralised nature of collegiality (Burnes et al., 2014). Neo-collegiality suggests restoring the broader more collective decision-making processes of collegiality but in a way that engages both academic and professional staff as peers across a HEI (Bacon, 2014; Elton, 1995; Rixom, 2011). Neo-collegiality also seeks to marry centralised decision-making with local control (Bacon, 2014). Among some of the elements required for neo-collegiality to gain traction is for the proposed group decision-making to take place around particular areas of work and for a trust in professionalism to emerge (Elton, 1995) reinforced by staff development. For academics, there are still considerable challenges posed by neo-collegiality, such as a need to work not as individuals but as equals in teams with non-academic staff, as well as reconciling their loyalty to their discipline with their loyalty to the HEI (Elton, 1995). In the UK, Bacon (2014) argues that now is a good time to update collegiality for a 21<sup>st</sup> century environment. Alternatively, a more measured pragmatic approach has been suggested by Alford & Hughes (2008), who “summon the venerable tradition of contingency theory” (p. 141), to propose a move away from the simplistic new managerialism/collegiality dichotomy to accepting that the most ideal management approach depends on situational factors (Alford & Hughes, 2008).

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#### **2.1.2.2.2 Middle managers are the key to the compromise**

This idea that new managerialism and collegiality can co-exist was the outcome of a study analysing data from a survey of 26 universities in eight European countries (Marini & Reale, 2015). That survey focused on middle managers (deans and heads of departments) because they are perceived to “represent a key level in university organizational dynamics” (Marini & Reale, 2015 p. 4). Not a lot is known about middle managers (De Boer et al., 2010; Hedley, 2010), with uncertainty over whether or not they are a coherent class (Hedley, 2010; Trowler, 2010), how they go about their business and what are their roles (De Boer et al., 2010; Rudhumbu, 2015). However, with the potential to subtly influence different local strategies and institutional programmes, middle managers are seen as mediators who assess and resolve tensions (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010; Marini & Reale, 2015), allowing for the smooth flow of information within departments and the institution (Rudhumbu, 2015). These middle managers are perfectly placed within the organisation for academic influence while also being able to encourage commercial, new managerial activity (Trowler, 2010; Winter, 2009). It has been argued that the role of the middle manager has changed with the introduction of new managerialism, to the extent that they are now expected to combine managerial and academic expertise (De Boer et al., 2010), drawing on different resources and alternative approaches (Trowler, 2010) under differing circumstances. Such a position may leave middle managers feeling vulnerable; dependent on the goodwill of their academic colleagues (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010) who may start to view them suspiciously (Preston & Price, 2012), while they become embroiled in an operational morass, making it a thankless task. However, it has been argued that, as neither managerialists nor collegialists (Trowler, 2010), middle managers could have the flexibility to respond to change and in doing so create a new departmental collegiality (Burnes et al., 2014).



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### 2.1.3 The contribution to knowledge in the collegiality-new managerialism debate

This review illustrates how all-encompassing the collegiality—new managerialism debate is when considering any aspect of management in HEIs. It would appear that any inquiry into the functioning processes of a HEI, including the processes for adopting blended learning, would need to be contextualised within the collegiality—new managerial debate. What also appears to have emerged from this review is that, while there is evidence of a dichotomy, the potential benefits that both the collegial and new managerialist approaches can bring suggests that there may be value in a compromise in the form of neo-collegiality. The role of middle managers in achieving that compromise also appears to be crucial, yet under-investigated.

The debate about new managerialism and collegiality as competing management approaches for HE is ongoing. However, the gap in the literature that this research seeks to address is in asking what do the efforts to manage blended learning courses, with the additional demands of educational technology, tell us about that larger debate. This research looks at the extent to which the collegial—new managerial debate manifests itself in the different management approaches taken to developing and delivering blended learning courses and the role played by blended learning course coordinators as HEI middle managers. The next step is then to see how the development of blended learning fits into this context and what the changes in practices brought about by the demands of blended learning say about the collegiality—new managerialism debate and a potential neo-collegial compromise.

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## 2.2 The Management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses

For this second part of the literature review, the focus is on discovering how the development and delivery of blended learning courses is being managed as reported in the literature. The following concepts were identified as a starting point for the literature selection and review:

- Blended Learning
- Management
- Higher education

Keyword / Phrases	management	"blended learning"	"higher education"
Alternatives	manage		"third level"
	develop		tertiary
	implement		university
	maintain		college
	administer		
	operate		

Table 2.3 Managing Blended Learning Search Terms

Placing Boolean operator OR between the words in the columns and Boolean operator AND in between the rows created the following search string.

“Blended Learning” AND (manag\* OR develop\* OR implement OR administer OR coordinate OR operat\* OR supervise OR maintain) AND (“higher education” OR tertiary OR “third level” OR university OR college)

The search was limited further by the following criteria:

- Material published in the last ten years
- Peer reviewed with references available
- English language
- Full Text Available

### 2.2.1 Literature selection and review procedure

The searches took place over a three-day period 23-25/5/16. The search string was applied to online resources listed on Lancaster University Library's Educational Research subject guide. Where possible, all searches were carried out on the abstract field. The search string above formed the basis for searches but was changed for some of the resources. The results are listed in Table 2.4.

<b>Management of Blended Learning</b>			
Field	Abstract		
Currency	10 Years		
Standard	Peer Reviewed		
Language	English		
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Engine</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Title/Abstract Review</b>
Academic Search Complete	EBSCOHost	221	8
British Education Index			
PsychArticles			
PsychINFO			
ERIC			
Web of Science		153	21
Science Direct		192	6
Taylor and Francis		247	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>813</b>	<b>47</b>

Table 2.4 Managing Blended Learning Search Results

#### 2.2.1.1 Critical review

The abstracts and titles of the results were scanned for relevance and the results were reduced from 813 to 47 by asking whether the results were:

- genuinely concerned with blended learning course development
- focused on the management of the course development
- duplicates

The selected 47 were read for relevance and some were rejected, but the list of articles grew to 61 by including some articles that had been cited in the 47 articles reviewed. Some of the additional articles were published prior to the

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ten-year search limit but were included because of their seminal nature. Most of the articles included in the review referred to blended learning specifically or discussed blended learning along with fully online courses or courses that utilised digital technology. Some articles did not use the term blended learning but were included, however, because they did discuss courses that met the definition of blended learning being used for this review—“the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 5).

A more specialist synthesis of the literature was possible with the literature in this part of the review because of the similarity between the articles retrieved. Extracts from the articles were coded and those codes were grouped into categories, which iteratively changed and merged with subsequent readings and further coding.

### 2.2.2 The Themes

The categories were then grouped under the following themes:

- Blended learning course development and delivery needs to be managed
- Blended learning course development and delivery is management averse
- There are identifiable attributes to the process of developing and delivering blended learning courses that can be used to determine the extent to which the processes are being managed

#### **2.2.2.1 Blended learning course development and delivery needs to be managed**

Introducing technology to education has been portrayed as being very complex (Casanovas, 2010; Conole, 2007; Niemiec & Otte, 2010). The complexity is seen as emerging from the idea that a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach to developing and delivering blended learning is often adopted (Botterill, 2013; Conole, 2007; Salmon, 2005). Collaboration is seen as necessary because the successful introduction of quality online material

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and teaching into a course often involves a combination of skills that are not typically resident in one individual but more likely to be provided by a multidisciplinary team (Boyle, 2005; Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010; Chew, 2009; Garrison & Vaughan, 2012; Vaughan, 2010). Many online and blended learning projects reported taking a multidisciplinary approach (Jones & O'Shea, 2004) between academics and computer scientists (Davis & Fill, 2007), between researchers, instructional designers, project managers and academics (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2012) and between academics and instructional designers (Chao et al., 2010). The level of collaboration required has led Botterill (2013) to suggest that building online content is an activity for what Whitchurch (2009) refers to as "blended professionals", who not only cross internal and external institutional boundaries, but also "contribute to the development of new forms of third space between professional and academic domains" (p. 407). Given that consensus is required in order for a team to function (Boyle, 2005), and that collaboration is notoriously difficult (Conole, 2007), the argument is that the complexity that results from trying to make a cross-organisation and cross-professional team work requires a higher degree of management than would have been needed for face-to-face curriculum development and delivery.

The complexity of organisational change compounds the complexity of collaboration. The move toward technology enhanced learning (TEL) in the form of blended learning courses, e-learning or online education has been portrayed as an instrument of organisational change (Conole, 2007; de Freitas & Oliver, 2005; Garrison & Vaughan, 2012; Jones & O'Shea, 2004; Marshall, 2012; Salmon, 2005; White, 2007). TEL has been seen as inspiring changes in approaches to teaching (Bocconi & Trentin, 2015; Bohle Carbonell et al., 2012; Kirkwood, 2014; Torrisi-Steele & Drew, 2013) to policy (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2012), to management (Goolnik, 2012), to work practices and work culture (Gregory & Lodge, 2015; Sharpe et al., 2006) and to strategy (Roberts, 2008). Change in a HEI environment is complex and challenging (Brown, 2012) and frequently contentious (Birds, 2014) and, therefore, needs to be managed (Conole, 2007).

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Transitioning to blended learning course development and delivery also introduces internal management challenges for a HEI. The need to up skill staff in order to utilise educational technology (Graham et al., 2012; Jones & O'Shea, 2004; Kaur, 2013; Korr, Derwin, Greene, & Sokoloff, 2012; McPherson & Whitworth, 2008; Porter, Graham, Spring, & Welch, 2014) requires coordination, as does ensuring that academic staff successfully navigate the nuances of copyright clearance and intellectual property rights in a digital era, which can be time consuming (Jones & O'Shea, 2004). Once an activity moves beyond the individual academic to involve more than one person, even the smallest level of coordination or management is required. Therefore, once the development of blended learning courses goes beyond one module to involve other members of the faculty or even extend beyond the department to an institute level, a managed institute response (Niemiec & Otte, 2010; Porter et al., 2014) becomes inevitable. Drysdale, Graham, Spring and Halverson (2013) have highlighted the extensive planning and coordination required to take blended learning institute wide. A managed approach is also required if blended learning course development is to be sustainable, given that it is difficult to see how sustainability can be achieved without the marrying of top-down and bottom-up initiatives (Casanovas, 2010) in a managed approach.

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### **2.2.2.2 Blended learning course development and delivery is management averse**

In contrast to above, there is also the suggestion that for course development to work, management needs to be avoided and can even be seen as harmful. Generally, any form of curriculum design has been portrayed as an iterative messy process (Conole, 2013), whether for on or offline learning. Specifically, for Casanovas (2010), the whole process of introducing online education is iterative and cannot be planned for. The argument has been made that when it comes to the design of blended learning courses, a bottom-up approach is even more important as academics are seeking to reconsider how students learn while trying to discover the right blend (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2012). Another reason why an un-managed bottom-up approach should be the case is that teachers themselves are iterative and spontaneous (Bocconi & Trentin, 2015). There is also the argument that teachers are responsible for determining the approach to blended learning (Alammary, Sheard, & Carbone, 2014; Georgouli, Skalkidis, & Guerreiro, 2008) and should have ownership of the course (Davis & Fill, 2007). The impression here is that blended learning course development should be allowed to happen naturally and spontaneously, unforced and unmanaged.

The idea that academics should have ownership of a course and be solely responsible for its design contradicts the notion of collaborative course development and suggests that a team-based approach is not essential for the diffusion of blended learning throughout an organisation (Nichols, 2008). One of the arguments in favour of the individual academic approach to design and development is that it ensures that the course is pedagogically and not technologically driven, which is seen as a significant concern for blended learning course development (Clegg, Hudson, & Steel, 2003; Davis & Fill, 2007; Georgouli et al., 2008; Niemiec & Otte, 2010; Picciano, 2009; Stacey & Gerbic, 2008). Other arguments in favour of the academic needing to retain control and ownership of the teaching environment include that that approach allows for the sanctity of independent scholarship to be respected (Teghe & Knight, 2004) and for academics to overcome any fear they have of the

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technology and change (Goolnik, 2012). With this academic-centric model for development and delivery, other members of the team are seen less as collaborators and are expected to fulfil more of a supportive role (Porter et al., 2014; Quinn et al., 2012). Concerns have been expressed that initiatives not controlled by academics, which are perceived as top-down led, will cause tensions and face resistance from academics (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2012; Clegg et al., 2003; Porter et al., 2014), whose culture does not suit systematic approaches (Chao et al., 2010). Developing and delivering blended learning courses in a managed team-based environment, where the academic is a partner, seems unlikely to gain the support of faculty. Under these circumstances, the development and delivery of blended learning courses would appear to be an un-managed process with minimal influence and involvement from those outside the academic discipline.

The two themes outlined above present a picture of contradicting extremes in the management of blended learning course development and delivery. On the one side, there is a highly managed process and, on the other, a much looser, less tangible, less predictable process that appears to be management averse. The two extremes in the management of BL course development and delivery is representable on a scale.



Fig. 2.1 Blended Learning Course Management Scale

Where to position approaches to blended learning course development and delivery on this managed scale requires a set of criteria against which to assess a particular approach.



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### **2.2.2.3 Identifiable attributes to determine the extent to which the development and delivery of blended learning is being managed**

There are models to explain the wide range of approaches to developing and delivering blended learning courses. The framework for institutional adoption and implementation of blended learning (Graham et al., 2012) identified three stages of institutional adoption—Awareness/Exploration, Adoption/Early implementation and Mature implementation/growth—and posited that the level of strategic, structural and support activity increased as institutions moved toward the third stage of adoption. The suggestion is that as a HEI progresses along the stages of institutional adoption, the level of management increases. However, this model works only on an institutional level and does not account for different levels of management that may be occurring within the same department or even within the same course. The level of disparity in a HEI is such that a multi-disciplinary team led by a project manager may be developing one module of a course and an academic working alone is developing a second module on the same course. Conole, White & Oliver (2007) use McNay's organisational types to help understand appropriate strategies for implementing e-learning in an institution. Identifying which of McNay's four idealised types of institutions—collegial, bureaucratic, enterprise or corporate (as cited in Conole et al., 2007)—a HEI is most closely aligned to can indicate whether a highly managed or un-managed approach is most suited. Again, this model takes an institutional view and is not able to account for different cultures existing within the same institution, department or course. In order to understand how the level of management involved in developing and delivering a blended learning course increases and decreases, a set of criteria is required with attributes that can illustrate a greater or lesser level of management.

What has emerged from this literature review is a number of attributes that, taken collectively, can form a typology to describe and help define the extent to which the development and delivery of blended learning courses is a managed process. The first attribute that drew consideration was the

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motivation or rationale behind the initiative. Sharpe et al. (2006) note that agreeing on what was the rationale for pursuing a blended learning course caused much debate and consideration within the faculty, which is not surprising given that curricular and institutional business needs do not always complement each other. Stepanyan, Littlejohn, & Margaryan's (2013) scoping review of the literature revealed that few studies looked at the "tensions between the concepts of cost-efficiency, effective pedagogy, and continuous innovative practice" (p. 98). The desire to respond to student teaching and learning needs (Bocconi & Trentin, 2015; Uys, Nleya, & Molelu, 2004) or to improve access to higher education (Bocconi & Trentin, 2015; Korr et al., 2012) are un-contentious motivations. However, the desire to pursue innovative teaching methods, which may be behind the move to blended learning (Bocconi & Trentin, 2015; Korr et al., 2012), will not necessarily fit well with the pursuit of greater cost efficiencies and effectiveness or improved mechanisms for quality assurance testing, which have also been identified as reasons for pursuing blended learning initiatives (Bocconi & Trentin, 2015; Goolnik, 2012; Korr et al., 2012; Stepanyan et al., 2013; Uys et al., 2004). It would appear that explaining the rationale was one attribute authors used to describe the development and delivery of BL courses.

A second attribute is where in the organisation did the drive to develop and deliver blended learning courses emerge i.e. whether the development of the blended learning course is being driven from the top of the organisation or whether it is a bottom-up initiative. The terms bottom-up and top-down, and a combination of the two, are common throughout the literature: Clegg et al. (2003) discuss bottom-up agendas; Bohle Carbonell et al. (2012) talk about a bottom-up project with the goal of discovering new blended learning formats and Marshall's (2010) discussion of the challenge of change for universities outlines that most of the universities assessed supported bottom-up, early adopter innovation. Similarly, the term top-down is frequently used to describe initiatives that emanate from senior management within a HEI: Bohle Carbonell et al. (2012) blamed the resistance created through top-down management of change for preventing a fully blended educational institute

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emerging, while Kearns (2002) discusses how studies in a number of the countries found that traditional top-down policies are too slow. For McPherson & Whitworth (2008), educational technology lies at the interface between top-down and bottom-up processes in HEIs and, similarly, Bohle Carbonell, et al. (2012) talk about bottom-up approaches as a bridge to the ultimate goal of ensuring every course in a university adopts a blended learning format. The LASO (Leadership, Academic & Student Ownership and Readiness) model for Technological Transformation in Higher Education highlights the importance of an integrated bottom-up and top-down inside-out approach (Uys, 2007). Pless & Maak (2011) argue that the bottom-up approach to blended learning development and delivery is frequently implemented in institutions with a 'collegiate' culture and a top-down approach more likely found in HEIs with a managerial culture. Whether a bottom up, top down or bottom-up meets top-down approach is adopted, blended learning initiatives are defined in the literature by the source within the organisation from which the drive initially emerged.

Blended learning and online education initiatives are also often described by how the development and delivery is organised; either centrally or on decentralised, discipline basis. Moskal et al. (2013) state a preference for a centralised over a decentralised approach to blended learning initiatives, while acknowledging that there is no standard organisational model. Chew (2009) also supports a centralised, institute-wide approach so as to avoid confusion and duplication. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) highlighted a clear institutional policy as one of the requirements for a blended learning approach that would promote the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning.

Alternatively, a faculty-based approach has also been promoted (Lightner & Lightner-Laws, 2013), where initiatives were funded on a school or faculty basis. Centralised structures and institution-wide policies can even be seen as barriers to the development of large-scale blended learning initiatives (Graham et al., 2012). The model promoted by Bohle Carbonell et al. (2012) is best described as a decentralised approach with each faculty having its own budget and project manager. Compromise approaches to development and

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delivery are often described in terms of centralised and decentralised, such as Salmon, Jones, & Armellini (2008), where the implementation was centrally approved, funded and organised but the work, very consciously, took place on a discipline basis. A variation of the decentralised-centralised approach was also a feature of models discussed by Bates (2000), Sharpe et al. (2006), and Torrisi-Steele & Drew (2013). Therefore, blended learning courses can also be described by the extent to which the development was organised centrally or on a discipline level.

The next descriptive attribute that emerged was who was responsible for leading the development and delivery of blended learning courses. Articles often define academics as leaders for blended learning initiatives. Academic leadership is deemed important so as to ensure that academics then have the independence to allow them to work the way they feel they need to (Davis & Fill, 2007). Academics are also seen as needing to be in charge in order that they can overcome any fears that they may have encountering change (Goolnik, 2012). For Sharpe et al. (2006) academic leadership was important in order for disciplines to have a sense of ownership of the blended learning initiatives. As stated above, another reason for academics to lead blended learning developments is because it is the best way to ensure that the sanctity of independent scholarship is protected (Teghe & Knight, 2004). Alternatively, professional staff could lead blended learning initiatives. A project manager to lead blended learning initiatives has been promoted by several commentators (Ari & Taplamacioglu, 2012; Boyle, 2005; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Korr et al., 2012). Also a compromise solution of professional staff and academics acting as co-leads has been proposed (Chao et al., 2010). Therefore, who leads the blended learning initiative is seen as a significant factor in how the initiative is managed and what course development could prioritise.

Another attribute to emerge as a way of describing how blended learning courses are managed is the staff dynamic, that is the way in which the staff involved in the process interact and relate to each other. One form of staff dynamic referred to above is to work collaboratively across disciplines and

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professional roles. These multi-skilled cross-functional teams could include academics, teaching assistants, graduate students and subject area librarians (Vaughan, 2010) or educationalists, technologists, subject specialists and support staff (Conole, 2007). The need for a collaborative multidisciplinary approach would appear to be all the more relevant at the start of a blended learning initiative, when many academics may be unsure of the best design approach (Alammary et al., 2014). The team approach allows faculty not to have to learn and manage technology on their own and will, therefore, be able to focus on the educational benefits of blended learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2012). Boyle et al. (2005) argue that building a creative group that works by consensus is vital to building an effective blended solution.

The working relationship can be a collaborative one within a discipline but less collaborative once outside the discipline. Jones & O'Shea (2004) claim from their study that collaborations outside the discipline were rare, given how strong discipline divisions are, and how well those divisions were supported by culture and tradition. Here, the work dynamic may be collaborative within the discipline, with the collaboration being supported from outside. Quinn et al. (2012) discuss how a support team can set up communities of practice for the academics to share experiences within the discipline but not necessarily participate in those communities of practice. It has also been acknowledged that the use of educational technology in blended learning courses challenges the culture of isolation in a HEI (Hillman & Corkery, 2010), and that there is a strangeness for academics that comes from working with colleagues outside their disciplinary area who may lack an academic tradition to the extent that their pedagogic basis is challenged (Jones & O'Shea, 2004). Faced with such challenges, the work dynamic that develops between colleagues may not be collaborative. A study by Botterill (2013) found that blended learning projects became contested work areas when there was an inability to defer to horizontal expert authority, which influenced the ability to work in an interdisciplinary way. Nichols (2008) questions the value of a team-based approach to blended learning design and the need for a centralised e-learning unit. For Porter et al. (2014), faculty and student advocates should drive

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blended learning adoption and administrators are there to facilitate that drive. A situation where the academic expects support as and when they want and need it (Davis & Fill, 2007) suggests a subservient rather than collaborative relationship. The emphasis on training and up-skilling of academic staff that is recommended by numerous studies suggests that the traditional individual model of course design can and should be maintained, once the academic has been sufficiently up-skilled. Either way, the staff involved and their working relationship or dynamic is a way of distinguishing between different approaches to how the design and delivery of blended learning courses is managed.

The development process is the final attribute identified to describe the management of blended learning course design and development. What is meant by development process is the extent to which the course is designed and delivered systematically or iteratively. As stated above, a number of studies depict the course design process as iterative (Conole, 2007) and not capable of being planned for (Casanovas, 2010), and that it should remain so in order to learn more about the design process (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2012) and because it suits the spontaneous nature of teaching (Bocconi & Trentin, 2015). Alternatively, blended learning is defined as a “systematic combination of face-to-face interactions and technologically mediated interactions between students, teachers and training resources” (Alammary et al., 2014 p. 234). Chao et al.’s (2010) study of the revision and development of 600 courses at Royal Roads University suggested that a systematic approach to course development was a necessity. In an analysis of research trends in dissertations and theses studying blended learning, Drysdale et al. (2013) noted a lack of research focusing on programme and institution-level blending, which the authors attribute to the extensive planning, coordination and stakeholder engagement required for this level of blend. Similarly, a study of three cases suggested that the implementation of eLearning initiatives need to be strategically developed and “based on a clear and unified vision and a central educational rationale” (Uys et al., 2004, p. 77). A compromise development process has also been promoted whereby a

systematic approach is adopted but one that also appreciates the need to facilitate creativity in course design. Boyle (2005) notes that the highly systematic approaches were seen as too rigid and not supportive enough of pedagogical innovation, especially with the emergence of constructivism, and that there is a need for more flexibility. Rossiter (2007) agrees, claiming that the ultimate goal is a system whereby “apparently contradictory agents and elements, such as creativity and conformity, order and disruption, collaboration and individualism (p. 104) are fostered.

From above, the following six attributes have emerged that collectively constitute a typology for describing the extent to which the development and delivery of a blended learning course is a managed exercise.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Rationale	What was the primary motive behind developing the course?
Driver	Was the development top-down or bottom-up driven?
Organised	How was development organised; centrally or decentrally?
Leader	Who led the development?
Staff Dynamic	What was the relationship between those involved in developing the course?
Development process	Was the course developed systematically or iteratively?

Table 2.5 Blended Learning Course Management Attributes

### **Applying the Typology**

From the 60 articles reviewed, 20 were identified that discussed specific cases of blended learning course development or models of how blended learning courses could be developed (Appendix One). The typology above was applied to those 20 cases or models by looking at each article and asking the questions in table 2.5. Answering those questions involved selecting one element per attribute. The elements emerged from codes that were assigned to passages of the selected articles following multiple readings. During this process, duplicated codes and codes that addressed the same aspect were

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merged. A table with a definition of each attribute and element is available in Appendix Two.

It should be noted that the elements listed under each attribute that are assigned to each model and case study are subject to interpretation because, more often than not, they were inferred or suggested rather than explicitly stated in the selected articles. This ambiguity with elements was most apparent with the rationale and staff dynamic attributes. The difficulty with the rationale attribute was that a number of rationales behind blending a course were discussed, so what was taken from the articles for the purposes of this analysis was what was deemed to be the overriding rationale or what appeared to be the most important rationale. The staff dynamic attribute was also difficult to break down into elements because it was rarely explicitly stated. As such, the type of staff dynamic in most of the cases or models was understood from the language used to discuss the processes involved in developing and delivering blended learning. The person responsible for leading the course development and delivery was also a challenge to define using the elements, although not to the same extent as the staff dynamic. The other attributes of process, organised and driven were more explicitly stated and, therefore, easier to apply elements to the cases and models. It is noted that reducing each article to a single, mutually exclusive element for each attribute on the typology runs the risk of not fully representing the cases and models selected.

The 20 cases or models were taken from 2006 to 2016. On initial inspection, a very clear distinction emerged, with nine of the initiatives seen as bottom-up driven and nine as top-down driven, and only two initiatives interpreted as being driven by both top-down and bottom-up forces (table 2.6).



<b>Driven</b>	<b>No.</b>		<b>Organised</b>	<b>No.</b>		<b>Led</b>	<b>No.</b>
<b>Top-down</b>	9		Centralised	4		Academic	13
<b>Bottom-up</b>	9		Distributed	13		Administrator	2
<b>Both</b>	2		Both	3		Manager	3
						Combination	2
	20			20			20

Table 2.6 Attributes in the Blended Learning Management Typology

This contrast between two extremes is also visible with the organisation attribute, where 13 initiatives are seen as being organised on a distributed basis, four organised centrally and three interpreted as being organised as a compromise between the two. Thirteen initiatives were seen as being led by academic staff, with five being led by either an administrator or a manager, and two interpreted as being led by both academic and professional staff.

Improving teaching methods and improving the learning experience was identified as the main rationales behind 11 of the initiatives (table 2.7), suggesting that pedagogical needs were the main rationale. Rationales associated with more managerial attributes—increasing student numbers, improved efficiency and student demands—were seen as the main rationales in only 6 models or cases. Similarly, in the staff interpersonal dynamic category, eight of the initiatives were interpreted as involving either lone academics or academics working in groups. Whereas, 12 initiatives were seen as joint affairs between academic and support staff, with five of those 12 understood to be genuine collaborations between academic and professional staff (table 2.7).

<b>Rationale</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Staff Dynamic</b>	<b>No.</b>
Efficiencies	1	Academics with support	7
Improve Learning Experience	6	Collaboration	5
Improve Teaching Methods	5	Groups of Academics	5
Increase Student Numbers	4	Individual Academics	3
Multiple	1		
None	2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>20</b>

Table 2.7 Attributes in the Blended Learning Management Typology

This initial inspection reinforces the contradiction of the two themes that emerged from the literature review—blended learning is a centrally organised, collaborative enterprise driven from the top and responding to market forces and therefore needs to be managed, versus the idea that blended learning is a distributed bottom-up driven effort led by academics responding to pedagogical needs that is management averse.

Further examination of the models and cases reveals that the attributes can be grouped together. In the thirteen models or cases that were seen as being led by academics, ten were interpreted as being organised on a distributed basis and only one was interpreted as having a collaborative staff dynamic. Seven of the initiatives led by academics appear to have a staff dynamic restricted to academics, with a further five involving academics who elicited support from professional staff (table 2.8).

Author	Year	Organised	Led	Staff Dynamic
Lightner, C. a., & Lightner-Laws, C. a. (2016)	2016	Distributed	Lecturer	Group of academics
Shaw, T., Barnet, S., Mcgregor, D., & Avery, J. (2015)	2015	Compromise	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Bocconi, S., & Trentin, G. (2015)	2015	Distributed	Lecturer	Individual academic
Alammary, A., Sheard, J., & Carbone, A. (2014)	2014	Distributed	Lecturer	Individual academic
Gedik, N., Kiraz, E., & Yassar Ozden, M. (2013)	2013	Distributed	Lecturer	Group of academics
Taylor, J. A., & Newton, D. (2012)	2012	Centralised	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Quinn, D., Amer, Y., Lonie, A., Blackmore, K., Thompson, L., & Pettigrove, M. (2012)	2012	Distributed	Lecturer	Collaboration
Picciano, A. G. (2009)	2009	Distributed	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Roberts, C. (2008)	2008	Distributed	Lecturer	Group of academics
Nichols, M. (2008)	2008	Distributed	Lecturer	Group of academics
Normand, C., Littlejohn, A., & Falconer, I. (2008)	2008	Distributed	Lecturer	Individual academic
Davis, H. C., & Fill, K. (2007)	2007	Distributed	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., & Francis, R. (2006)	2005	Compromise	Lecturer	Academics with Support

Table 2.8 Cases and Models Led by Academics

Eight of the 13 cases or models that were seen as being organised on a distributed basis were interpreted as being driven from the bottom up (table 2.9).

Author	Year	Driven	Organised
Lightner, C. a., & Lightner-Laws, C. a. (2016)	2016	Bottom Up	Distributed
Bocconi, S., & Trentin, G. (2015)	2015	Bottom Up	Distributed
Alammary, A., Sheard, J., & Carbone, A. (2014)	2014	Bottom Up	Distributed
Gedik, N., Kiraz, E., & Yassar Ozden, M. (2013)	2013	Bottom Up	Distributed
Goolnik, G. (2012)	2012	Compromise	Distributed
Bohle Carbonell, K., Dailey-Hebert, A., & Gijsselaers, W. (2012)	2012	Bottom Up	Distributed
Quinn, D., Amer, Y., Lonie, A., Blackmore, K., Thompson, L., & Pettigrove, M. (2012)	2012	Compromise	Distributed
Chao, I. T., Saj, T., & Hamilton, D. (2010)	2010	Top-Down	Distributed
Picciano, A. G. (2009)	2009	Bottom Up	Distributed
Roberts, C. (2008)	2008	Top-Down	Distributed
Nichols, M. (2008)	2008	Top-Down	Distributed
Normand, C., Littlejohn, A., & Falconer, I. (2008)	2008	Bottom Up	Distributed
Davis, H. C., & Fill, K. (2007)	2007	Bottom Up	Distributed

Table 2.9 Cases and Models Organised on a Distributed basis

Similarly, all bar one of the manager or administrator-led cases or models of development were driven from the top and followed a systematic development process (table 2.10).

Author	Rationale	Driven	Organised	Process	Led
Mirriahi, N., Alonzo, D., McIntyre, S., Kligyte, G., & Fox, B. (2015)	Student Demands	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic	Manager
Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2012)	Improve teaching methods	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic	Manager
Goolnik, G. (2012)	More efficient operation	Compromise	Distributed	Compromise	Manager
Korr, J., Derwin, E. B., Greene, K., & Sokoloff, W. (2012)	Improve teaching methods	Top-Down	Compromise	Systematic	Administrator
Abdous, M. (2009)	None	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic	Administrator

Table 2.10 Cases and Models Led by Manager/Administrator

Moreover, all of the nine top-down led models were deemed to have followed a systematic development process (table 2.11).

Author	Rationale	Driven	Organised	Process
Mirriahi, N., Alonzo, D., McIntyre, S., Kligyte, G., & Fox, B. (2015)	Student Demands	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic
Taylor, J. A., & Newton, D. (2012)	Improve learning experience	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic
Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2012)	Improve teaching methods	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic
Korr, J., Derwin, E. B., Greene, K., & Sokoloff, W. (2012)	Improve teaching methods	Top-Down	Compromise	Systematic
Chao, I. T., Saj, T., & Hamilton, D. (2010)	Improve learning experience	Top-Down	Distributed	Systematic
Abdous, M. (2009)	None	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic
Roberts, C. (2008)	Increase Numbers	Top-Down	Distributed	Systematic
Nichols, M. (2008)	None	Top-Down	Distributed	Systematic
Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., & Francis, R. (2006)	Improve learning experience	Top-Down	Compromise	Systematic

Table 2.11 Cases and Models Driven from Top Down

Therefore, it would appear that attributes coalesce around two distinct approaches to blended learning development. These two approaches can be aligned to a new managerialist-collegiality distinction, as outlined in table 2.12.

<b>Category</b>	<b>New Managerialist</b>	<b>Collegial</b>
Motivation	Business goal	Teaching and learning
Driver direction	Top-Down	Bottom-up
Organised	Centrally	Decentralised
Led	Professional	Academic
Development	Systematic	Iterative
Staff interpersonal dynamic	Multidisciplinary team	Individual academic or collaboration between academics

Table 2.12 Blended learning management typology through new managerialist-collegiality lens

However, the review of the 20 cases or models does show some crossover between what could be defined as new managerialist and collegial approaches. For example, nine of the 13 lecturer-led models or cases were developed systematically and only two iteratively, and two were seen as a combination of the two (table 2.13).

Author	Type	Process	Led
Normand, C., Littlejohn, A., & Falconer, I. (2008)	Model	Compromise	Lecturer
Davis, H. C., & Fill, K. (2007)	Case	Compromise	Lecturer
Alammary, A., Sheard, J., & Carbone, A. (2014)	Model	Iterative	Lecturer
Picciano, A. G. (2009)	Model	Iterative	Lecturer
Lightner, C. a., & Lightner-Laws, C. a. (2016)	Model	Systematic	Lecturer
Shaw, T., Barnet, S., Mcgregor, D., & Avery, J. (2015)	Model	Systematic	Lecturer
Bocconi, S., & Trentin, G. (2015)	Model	Systematic	Lecturer
Gedik, N., Kiraz, E., & Yassar Ozden, M. (2013)	Case	Systematic	Lecturer
Taylor, J. A., & Newton, D. (2012)	Case	Systematic	Lecturer
Quinn, D., Amer, Y., Lonie, A., Blackmore, K., Thompson, L., & Pettigrove, M. (2012)	Case	Systematic	Lecturer
Roberts, C. (2008)	Model	Systematic	Lecturer
Nichols, M. (2008)	Model	Systematic	Lecturer
Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., & Francis, R. (2006)	Case	Systematic	Lecturer

Table 2.13 Models and Cases led by the lecturer

Four of the nine top-down driven initiatives were led by academics (table 2.14), and in the seven initiatives that were seen to have an academic with

Author	Driven	Organised	Led
Korr, J., Derwin, E. B., Greene, K., & Sokoloff, W. (2012)	Top-Down	Compromise	Administrator
Abdous, M. (2009)	Top-Down	Centralised	Administrator
Chao, I. T., Saj, T., & Hamilton, D. (2010)	Top-Down	Distributed	Combination
Taylor, J. A., & Newton, D. (2012)	Top-Down	Centralised	Lecturer
Roberts, C. (2008)	Top-Down	Distributed	Lecturer
Nichols, M. (2008)	Top-Down	Distributed	Lecturer
Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., & Francis, R. (2006)	Top-Down	Compromise	Lecturer
Mirriahi, N., Alonzo, D., McIntyre, S., Kligyte, G., & Fox, B. (2015)	Top-Down	Centralised	Manager
Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2012)	Top-Down	Centralised	Manager

Table 2.14 Models and Cases driven from the top-down

support staff dynamic, three were interpreted as being driven from the bottom, three from the top and one as a compromise between the two (table 2.15).

Author	Type	Driven	Process	Staff Dynamic
Davis, H. C., & Fill, K. (2007)	Case	Bottom Up	Compromise	Academics with Support
Picciano, A. G. (2009)	Model	Bottom Up	Iterative	Academics with Support
Shaw, T., Barnet, S., Mcgregor, D., & Avery, J. (2015)	Model	Bottom Up	Systematic	Academics with Support
Goolnik, G. (2012)	Model	Compromise	Compromise	Academics with Support
Taylor, J. A., & Newton, D. (2012)	Case	Top-Down	Systematic	Academics with Support
Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., & Francis, R. (2006)	Case	Top-Down	Systematic	Academics with Support
Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2012)	Case	Top-Down	Systematic	Academics with Support

Table 2.15 Models and Cases with a staff dynamic of Academics with Support

In terms of crossover, the most frequently occurring attributes (table 2.16) were a combination of the attributes associated with a new managerialist and collegial approach.

Category	Most frequently occurring attribute
Rationale	Improve learning experience
Driven	Bottom up/top down
Organised	Distributed
Process	Systematic
Led	Lecturer-led
Staff Dynamic	Academics with support

Table 2.16 Most frequently occurring attributes



Table 2.17 below shows the management typology of blended learning courses as seen through a new-managerialist-collegial lens with an additional neo-collegial column.

<b>Category</b>	<b>New Managerialist</b>	<b>Collegial</b>	<b>Neo-Collegial</b>
Motivation	Business goal	Teaching and learning	Both business and Teaching and learning equally prioritised
Driver direction	Top-Down	Bottom-up	Bottom-up and Top-down
Organised	Centrally	Decentralised	Centrally managed with decentralised control
Led	Professional	Academic	A professional academic
Development	Systematic	Iterative	Systematic with space for innovation
Staff interpersonal dynamic	Multidisciplinary team	Individual academic or collaboration between academics	Collaborative and multi-disciplinary

Table 2.17 Blended learning management through a new-managerial—collegial—neo collegial lens

The review of the 20 blended learning cases and/or models against the typology reveals that there are distinct approaches to managing blended learning course development and delivery that can be labelled collegial or new managerial. The review also illustrates that developing blended learning courses can lead to a cross over, with cases and models characterised by attributes associated with both new managerialism and collegiality, in what could be termed a neo-collegial approach.

### 2.2.3 The contribution to knowledge in the field of managing blended learning courses and the link to collegiality—new managerialism debate

The literature review indicates that there is a wealth of models to guide blended learning development and delivery and of case studies of blended learning implementation. These models and case studies reveal a sometime contradictory approach to how the development and delivery of blended learning is managed. What appears to be lacking, however, is a common set of attributes against which it is possible to assess how ‘managed’ are the processes for developing and delivering blended learning courses. The

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blended learning management typology that has emerged from this literature review goes some way to addressing that gap. This review has also illustrated how the blended learning typology can be applied to published models and cases studies and how such models and case studies can be viewed in the context of the debate over collegiality and new managerialism.

This study of the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses utilises this typology to indicate how different approaches can be defined in terms of the collegiality-new managerial debate. Where there also appears to be a gap in the literature is in studies that illustrate what challenges are involved in taking a collegial, new managerial or neo-collegial approach to the management of blended learning courses. Having an understanding of the type of challenges that can emerge, depending on which approach is adopted as indicated by the typology, will allow managers of blended learning courses to take a more informed view of their approach. CHAT is an analytical framework that has been used by researchers to expose the tensions, contradictions, paradoxes and conflicts in a functioning system many of which may be hidden (Blackler, 1995). The next step in the literature review is to explore the use of activity theory as a mechanism for assessing process in a HE environment, with the intention of using it to assess the processes behind blended learning course development and delivery and expose any contradictions.

### **2.3 Activity Theory and the study of organisational behaviour in HE**

New managerialism versus collegiality has been portrayed as a dichotomy rife with conflicts. As stated CHAT, and more specifically Engeström's Activity Systems Model (ASM), focusses on exposing challenges and conflicts within an activity system. It does so by having the researcher identify and analyse the primary contradiction that drives the development of the activity system and its conflicts. Therefore, for this third part of the literature review, the focus is on the use of CHAT and ASMs for the study of organisational behaviour and specifically for the study of the management of blended learning in a HE context.

For the literature search, the following concepts were identified:

- Activity Theory
- Organisational Behaviour
- Higher education

Keyword / Phrases	"activity theory"	"organisational behaviour"	"higher education"
Alternatives	"activity systems model"	"organizational behaviour"	"third level"
	Engestrom	Process	tertiary
	Leont'ev	Culture	university
		organis*	college
		organiz*	

Table 2.18 Activity Theory Search Terms

Placing Boolean operator OR between the words in the columns and Boolean operator AND in between the rows created the following search string:

("Activity theory" OR "activity systems model" OR Engeström OR Leont'ev) AND ("higher education" OR college OR university OR "third level" OR tertiary) AND ("organisational behaviour" OR "organizational behavior" OR process OR culture OR organis\* OR organiz\*)

The search was limited further by the following criteria:

- Material published in the last ten years
- Peer reviewed with references available
- English language
- Full Text Available

### 2.3.1 Literature selection and review procedure

The searches, which took place over a three-day period 25-28/4/17, were applied to online resources listed on Lancaster University Library's

Educational Research subject guide. Where possible, all searches were carried out on the abstract field. The search string above formed the basis for searches but was changed for some of the resources. The resources and results are listed in table 2.11.

<b>Activity Theory and Higher Education</b>			
Field	Abstract		
Currency	10 Years		
Standard	Peer Reviewed		
Language	English		
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Engine</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Title/Abstract Review</b>
Academic Search Complete	EBSCOHost	50	3
British Education Index			
PsychArticles			
PsychINFO			
ERIC			
JSTOR		46	1
Proquest		65	4
Web of Science		91	1
Science Direct		192	6
Taylor and Francis		277	11
SAGE Journals		6	0
SCOPUS		228	3
Total		995	28

Table 2.19 Activity Theory Search Results

### 2.3.1.1 Critical review

The abstracts and titles of the results were scanned for relevance and the results were reduced from 955 to 28 by asking whether the documents retrieved offered a discussion of the theoretical foundation of activity theory or its use in a study in a higher education context. The list of 28 articles grew to 61 by including articles and book chapters that had been cited in the 28 documents retrieved. The ten-year publication limit was frequently broken in an effort to include articles and book chapters that discussed the theoretical basis and historical development of activity theory.

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As with the previous part of the literature review, and distinct from the first part of the literature review, a more specialist synthesis of the literature was possible because of the similarity between the documents retrieved. Extracts from the documents were coded and those codes were grouped into categories, which iteratively changed and merged with subsequent readings and further coding.

### 2.3.2 The Themes

The categories were then grouped under the following themes:

- Engeström's Activity Systems Model (ASM) described
- Theoretical basis for ASM
- Studies that utilised ASM to examine organisational behaviour in a HE context
- Criticisms of the use of ASM as a theoretical framework

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### 2.3.2.1 Engeström's Activity Systems Model described

Activity theory, which has been defined as a cross-disciplinary framework for studying human practices (Kuutti, 1995), takes a holistic approach to describing human activity within its contexts (Shanahan, 2010). In the case of this thesis, the human activity would be the management of the development and delivery of a blended learning course and the contexts would be the HE sector coming to terms with the impact of digital technology on teaching and learning while in the midst of a clash between new managerialism and collegiality. Activity theory was outlined as an ASM by Engeström (2015), who, in his pursuit of a better understanding of the structure and dynamics of different types of learning, identified the need for a conceptual mechanism for analysing activity. In the ASM that emerged (Fig 2.2),

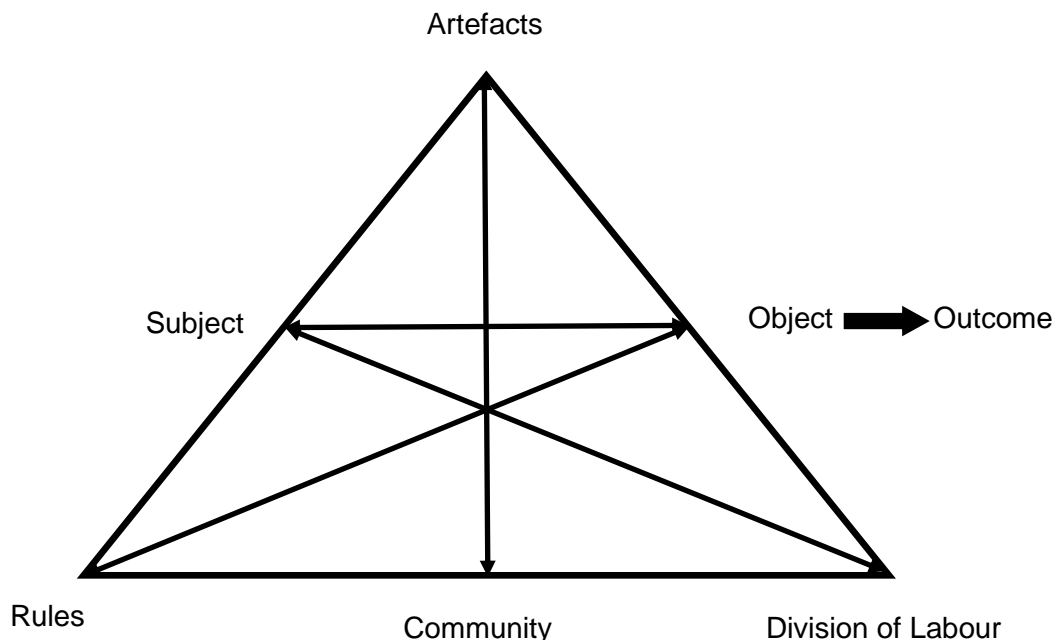


Fig. 2.2 Activity Systems Model (Engeström, 2015)

the key unit of analysis is activity (Kuutti, 1995; Shanahan, 2010), which is what occurs when the subject works to achieve an object. The subject is defined as people (or groups of people) who have a defined purpose (Shanahan, 2010). The subject is also defined as the person, or persons, from whose perspective the activity is being viewed (Bligh & Flood, 2015). The object has been defined as the understanding shared by the subject of what that purpose is (Shanahan, 2010). Turning the object into an outcome

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motivates the need for activity, although it has been argued that the true nature of the object and motivation is revealed through doing; through the activity (Kuutti, 1995). The activity is defined as the actions and processes carried out by the subject to achieve the object (Shanahan, 2010) and satisfy the motivation. Activities are not static but constantly changing and evolving, and they are distinguished from other activities by different objects (Kuutti, 1995). Activities are made up of actions, which in turn are made up of operations; unconscious tasks carried out without the need to think or rationalise. Actions are goal orientated and activities are object orientated (Kaptelinin, Nardi & MaCaulay, 1999).

According to activity theory, human activity is mediated (Kaptelinin, 1996): the activity between a subject and an object is mediated by tools or artefacts that have been developed by human kind; rules mediate the activity between the subject and the community the activity effects and the division of labour mediates the activity between the object and the community (Kuutti, 1995). Artefacts are any instruments that impact on the subject's relationship with the world. They can be physical, like a computer, or psychological, like a concept (Kaptelinin, 1996). Physical artefacts allow people to affect things, while psychological artefacts allow people to affect others or themselves (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2006). Artefacts have both an expanding and limiting effect. They allow subjects to achieve more by incorporating the skill and knowledge of others and the past that has been built into the artefact, or they can be limiting in that the artefact determines from its perspective how the operations and actions of an activity take place (Kuutti, 1995). The idea that artefacts have a limiting and expansive impact in the context of using educational technologies raises the concept of technological affordance, where affordances are commonly understood to be "the possibilities for action provided by the environment" (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2006, p. 80). However, the concept of affordance is a contested area (Oliver, 2005; Parchoma, 2014) with regard to the positivist-interpretivist inconsistency of affordances being portrayed as both real and perceived (Oliver, 2005). However, It has been suggested that artefacts according to CHAT's definition of the term—mediators situated in

practice, dependent on the people and the purpose of the activity—gets around the inconsistency behind affordance theory (Oliver, 2005). Artefacts then are any physical or psychological instruments that mediate the subject’s relationship with the object for that given activity and situation.

Community refers to the social context within which the activity takes place (Oliver, 2012). This wider group of people, from which the subjects are drawn (Bligh & Flood, 2015), have a sense of working together to achieve a common end. Rules are the restrictions within which an activity takes place. Rules can be stated and explicit or they can be more implicit (Mwanza, 2001), for example accepted cultural behaviours are rules in CHAT. The division of labour relates to the distribution between participants of the actions and operations that make up the activity and the power relationships associated with that division of labour (Amory, 2012). Vertical differentiated division of labour relates to management authority, whereas horizontal differentiated division of labour is based on expert authority (Amory, 2012). The elements of the ASM are defined in table 2.12.

ASM Element	Definition
Subject	People (or groups of people) who have a defined purpose. The person or people from whose perspective the activity is being viewed.
Object	An understanding shared by the subject of what that purpose of the activity is. The object refers to both the motivation of the activity and a material object, what is produced by the activity
Activity	Actions and processes carried out by the subject to achieve the object
Artefacts	Also known as tools, artefacts are any physical or psychological instrument that impacts on the relationship between the subject and the object. Artefacts can have both an expanding and limiting effect.
Rules	Either explicit or implicit, rules refer to the restrictions within which an activity takes place.
Division of Labour	How the actions and operations that constitute the activity are distributed and the nature of the power relationship associated with that distribution
Community	The wider social group who share the common aim of achieving the object but who do not necessarily carry out the actions and operations of the activity

Table 2.20 Elements of the ASM Defined



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As stated, the purpose of the ASM is to provide a mechanism to analyse activity. It facilitates this analysis by identifying the elements in the activity system—subject, object, artefacts, rules, community and division of labour—as a conceptual framework for the analysis. Practically, this can mean using the elements as pre-defined categories for coding (McNicholl & Blake, 2013) or taking themes that emerged from an analysis and comparing them against the elements in ASM (Oliver, 2012). Alternatively, Mwanza (2001) operationalized ASM into a model to guide the collection as well as the analysis of data.

The ASM can also be utilised to identify contradictions. The concept of primary contradictions is used to identify practices that are in conflict (Mwanza, 2002). These practices can be identified within elements of the ASM, between elements and between different activities or different phases of the same activity (Kuutti, 1995). Contradictions present as problems but are seen by activity theorists as opportunities for development and learning. For organisational behaviour, contradictions are important because they are apparent in seemingly rational processes but staff in organisations are actually using their skill to overcome them, as such, contradictions are seen as drivers of change and as a source of staff developing new knowledge and ways of practice (Blackler, 1995).

### **2.3.2.2 Theoretical basis for the ASM**

From the description above, it is possible to identify five concepts behind the ASM:

- activity is the key unit of analysis
- activity is mediated
- mediation means collaboration
- activity is contextualised
- contradictions

One way of looking at the theoretical basis for the ASM as reported in the literature is to examine the theoretical basis for each of these five concepts.

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### **2.3.2.2.1 Activity is the key unit of analysis**

Focusing on the activity as the unit of analysis comes from the idea that no properties of the subject or object exist before and beyond the activity and, as a result, that an analysis of the activity is necessary in order to understand either the subject or the object (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). Engeström (2015) traces the theoretical basis for the central role of activity back to methodological and conceptual breakthroughs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from which emerged the idea that humans and the natural world were integral systems that involved change and development, rather than separate stable entities. This rejection of a dualist view of humanity's relationship with the world, as asserted by Hegel (Engeström, 2015), was developed by Marx and Engels and the theory of dialectical-materialism, which argues that the material world precedes human consciousness and that an increasing knowledge of the material world comes from the constantly developing nature of phenomena (Bligh & Flood, 2015). Vygotsky builds on dialectical materialism to argue that the mind is shaped by the generative forces of culture and society (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006), in other words, that consciousness develops as a result of internalising relations that existed in culture and society (Bligh & Flood, 2015). Therefore, activity becomes the key to understanding the object and the subject because of the unifying relationship between consciousness and activity, whereby "the human mind emerges and exists as a special component of human interaction with the environment" (Kaptelinin, 1996, p. 55). By analysing activity we, therefore, gain an understanding of both the people and the purpose of activity and the true motivation driving the activity.

### **2.3.2.2.2 Activity is mediated**

The theoretical basis for the idea that all activity is mediated lies with Vygotsky, who argued that although the human mind is intrinsically related to culture and society, the human rarely interacts with culture and society directly, but rather that the interaction is mediated by any number of artefacts (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). In other words, rather than directly responding to stimulus, human acts are mediated through a cultural component (Sannino, 2011). The idea of mediated acts emerged from Vygotsky's interpretation of

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Marx and viewing human action through dialectical-materialism (Sannino, 2011)—if human consciousness only arises as a reflection of material conditions, and if everything is in a state of constant change, it is difficult to see how actions are not mediated given that they are the product of a consciousness that is reflecting a material world that is subjected to constantly changing conditions. Vygotsky argued that the mind is shaped by the generative forces of society and culture (Bligh & Flood, 2015). Artefacts are an example of the generative forces of society and culture. They can be physical, as in a piece of technology or they can be psychological. Physical artefacts allow people to affect things, while psychological artefacts allow people to affect others or themselves (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2006). Vygotsky realised from empirical studies that people who were using external artefacts to problem solve stopped using those artefacts and improved their performance, a process Vygotsky identified as internalisation, whereby processes that were previously mediated externally become mediated internally (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). With internalisation, aspects of what existed previously externally become internally mediated by internal signs in a redistribution of internal and external components (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). This redistribution can lead to an increased reliance on internal components rather than external ones (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). Therefore, a change occurs; mediation takes place. If we accept that mediation is an unavoidable aspect of activity, an understanding of the impact of mediating artefacts on activity is necessary to understanding the activity.

#### **2.3.2.2.3 Activity is collaborative**

Vygotsky's theory of internalisation also suggests that activity is collaborative and not individual. For Vygotsky, the process of internalisation occurs when the external becomes internal and when the interpsychological (between people) becomes intrapsychology (a function of the individual) (Bligh & Flood, 2015). The implication is that internalisation, the process whereby consciousness develops, starts with a collaborative, interpsychological experience. The idea that activity is collaborative also emerges from Leontiev's work building on Vygotsky's theory of mediation. In pursuit of an

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analytical mechanism focused on activity to devise a theory of the development of the mind, Leontiev took Vygotsky's theory of mediation and looked at tools, language and the division of labour as aspects of culture and society that fundamentally impact the mind (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). Leontiev identified that tools were a manifestation of collaboration and socially distributed work. Tools are cultural-specific, that is they have developed over time (Kaptelinin, 1996), and in doing so embody the past experience and skills of others; so to use a tool is to engage in a collaborative experience. Tools and their distribution also led to the development of sophisticated forms of co-operation and collaborative work—tools can be made for use by others in the social group or be used to facilitate the coordination of individual contributions to collective activity (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). Leontiev's analysis of human activity also suggested that "humans can separate life motives, objects of collective activity, and goals pursued by individual actions" (Bligh & Flood, 2015, p. 5) which, for Leontiev, implies that humans are capable of making a distinction between an individual action and a collective activity, as well as implying the need to divide up labour appropriately (Bligh & Flood, 2015). Following on the work of Leontiev, Engeström states that "we may well speak of the activity of the individual, but never of individual activity; only actions are individual" (Engeström, 2015, p. 54).

#### **2.3.2.2.4 Activity is contextualised**

For Engeström, Leontiev had identified missing aspects of Vygotsky's model by seeing that humans and society are intertwined with a history (Bligh & Flood, 2015). Having identified tools, language and the division of labour as three aspects of culture that have a fundamental impact on the mind, Leontiev, according to Engeström (2015), then stopped short of modelling these additional mediators as an addition to Vygotsky's subject—tool—object model. Engeström takes Leontiev's extension of Vygotsky's model, the concept of activity in pursuit of material production that is mediated by technical and psychological tools, or artefacts, and other humans, and develops a model structuring of human activity (Engeström, 2015).

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In modelling an activity system, Engeström brings human, technological and organisational elements together in an inter-related and almost inseparable manner (Benson & Whitworth, 2007). With the ASM (Fig 2.2), Engeström seeks to describe holistically a human activity in a dynamic model of the subjects, artefacts and objects of activity within a context of rules, a community, and a division of labour (Vandenberg, 2005).

#### **2.3.2.2.5 Contradictions**

As stated, the ASM functions as a mechanism for identifying contradictions within an activity system and that these contradictions have been portrayed as drivers of development, change and creating new knowledge (Blackler, 1995). “The basic internal contradiction of human activity is its dual existence as the total societal production and as one specific production among many” (Engeström, 2015, p. 66). Human activity exists as a series of individual specific productions alongside many other individual specific actions and as the total societal production (Engeström, 2015). Within an ASM, that translates as the “clash between individual actions and the total activity system” (Engeström, 2015, p. 66). The theoretical basis for identifying the contradiction between individual actions and the total activity system lies in Marx’s (Marx, 1910 cited in Engeström, 2015) discussion of exchange value (the market value) and use value (the usefulness), with the essential contradiction occurring between the “mutual exclusion and simultaneous mutual dependency of use value and exchange value in each commodity” (Engeström, 2015). It would appear that the fundamental contradiction in activity in pursuit of an outcome, a commodity, is the conflict that emerges because the activity is trying to simultaneously satisfy the need for exchange value and for use value as they pull in opposite directions. Engeström (2015) suggested that four types of contradictions can be found in the ASM: those that occur within the elements of the ASM (primary), between the elements (secondary) of the ASM, between the object of the central activity and the object of a culturally more advanced form of the activity (tertiary) and between neighbouring activities (quaternary). Contradictions are important because

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“new qualitative stages and forms of activity emerge as solutions to the contradictions of the preceding stage or form” (Engeström, 2014, p. 73). Virkkunen and Newnham (cited in Bligh & Flood, 2015) suggest that contradictions are progressive: primary contradictions between use value and exchange value occur within elements of the activity system and compensating for primary contradictions leads to contradictions between elements (secondary contradictions). Taking steps to address secondary contradictions leads to the development of a new activity, which leads to tertiary contradictions, that is contradictions between the older and newer versions of the activity. Finally, compensating for tertiary contradictions leads to contradictions between the newer activity system and neighbouring activity systems. Engeström (2015) highlights four types of neighbouring activities: object activities, where the object and outcome of the central activity are embedded in the neighboring activity; instrument activities, where the neighboring activity produces an object that becomes a key instrument for the central activity; subject-producing activities; where the neighbouring activity produces, informs or develops the subject of the central activity and rule producing activities, where the neighbouring activity produces rules for the central activity.

For Engeström (2015), contradictions drive change as activity systems are remodeled in an effort to overcome the contradictions. Engeström (2015) builds on Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to illustrate the driving nature of contradictions. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86 cited in Engeström, 2015, p. 134). Engeström redefines the ZPD as “the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in the everyday actions” Engeström, 2015, p. 138). A double bind for Engeström is a “social, societally essential dilemma that

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cannot be resolved through separate individual actions alone – but in which joint cooperative actions can push a historically new form of activity into emergence” (Engeström, 2015, p. 131). Engeström is arguing that systemic contradictions within an activity manifest themselves as double binds that require cooperative actions to drive the development of a new activity, and, as such are the drivers of development, change and the creation of new knowledge (Blackler, 1995).

In the course of devising the ASM, Engeström (2015) maps a theoretical path from the Hegelian rejection of a dualist view of humanity through to Marx’s discussion of dialectical materialism and inherent contradictions through to Vygotsky and Leontiev’s psychology to develop a mechanism to analyse contextualised, mediated activity. In doing so, he also highlights the sources of development and change as overcoming systemic contradictions identified in the ASM and their resulting double binds. The description of, and theoretical basis behind, Engeström’s ASM indicate that it is an appropriate mechanism to explore organisational behaviour at the meso level. The elements outlined in the ASM allow for an activity to be defined and then analysed through each element and the relationships between the elements. In doing so, the ASM conceptually brings together seemingly disparate processes and provides a vocabulary with which to discuss those processes. Defining the activity as the central unit of analysis also provides a mechanism to discuss organisational behaviour at the meso level. With the ASM, the central unit of analysis is not long-term planning at a strategic level, nor is it day-to-day actions and operations but rather what occurs in-between, activity, which is made up of actions and operations and contributes to achieving long-term goals. Given its emphasis on activity, mediation, contextualisation and identifying contradictions and their manifestations, it is not surprising that the ASM has been used by researchers analysing organisational behaviour specifically within a HEI context.

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### 2.3.2.3 Studies that utilised ASM in a higher education context

Of the 61 documents retrieved for the literature reviewed, 26 were identified as studies that used the ASM to research organisational behaviour in a HE context. Of the 26, which dated from 2000-2016, 11 were identified as using the ASM to assess the impact of education technology. Mwanza (2002), Hasan and Crawford (2003), Mwanza and Engeström (2003) and McAvinia and Oliver (2004) used CHAT to analyse practices and processes to inform the design and development of education technology, such as content management systems, whereas Russell and Schneiderheinze (2005), Vandenberg (2005) Netteland, Wasson and Mørch (2007), Blin and Munro (2008), Karasavvidis (2009), Rasmussen and Ludvigsen (2009), Karasavvidis (2010) and Amory (2012) used the ASM to assess the impact of specific educational technology on teaching and/or learning processes. Oliver (2012) used the ASM to assess the impact of educational technology on the changing role of the academic. A further nine articles used the ASM to assess the design and development of the curriculum. Robinson, Anning and Frost (2005); Greenhow and Belbas (2007); Joyes and Chen (2007) and Garraway (2010) looked at knowledge sharing in the curriculum design process either between academics or between academics and students. The ASM has also been utilised as a conceptual basis for the design of curriculum often, but not always, when designing online or blended courses (Hung, Yu, Liou, & Hsu, 2010; Osorio Gómez & Duart, 2012; Rumpite, 2009). Of the six remaining studies, four used CHAT to look at macro-level developments. These studies utilised CHAT to examine the impact of educational technology on organisational change at a macro level; as a disruptive influence on the structures of a HEI (Flavin, 2016) and to view the development and change of HEI strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2003; McNicholl & Blake, 2013). The final two studies retrieved used CHAT to examine the management of meso-level organisational relationships—in course design using a content management system (Benson & Whitworth, 2007) and faculty entering new work contexts (Trowler & Knight, 2000). The ASM has been utilised in a number of organisational contexts to examine management, organisational behaviour and knowledge transfer (Blackler, 1995; Engeström, 2014; Engeström &



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Sannino, 2011; Prenkert, 2006; Zott & Amit, 2010). It appears from the studies above that the ASM tends to be used to analyse the micro level practices of teaching and learning and curriculum design, and that there has been some limited use of CHAT as an analytical framework to assess organisational behaviour at a macro level. However, only one study was unearthed that used the ASM as a mechanism for examining meso level management of course design and development in a HEI.

#### **2.3.2.4 Criticisms of the use of ASM as a theoretical framework**

As the studies above suggest, activity theory is being “increasingly viewed as a potentially fertile paradigm for research in education” (Bakhurst, 2009, p. 197). However, its theoretical basis and research value have come in for criticism. It has been noted that, despite its name, activity theory is not a theory (Mwanza, 2002) and that it is not clear if activity theory is sufficient as a methodology for approaching the study of activities (Shanahan, 2010). Peim (2009) questions Engeström’s engagement with the philosophical tradition it claims to have emerged from, suggesting that Engeström celebrates the importance of mediation, yet fails to acknowledge his own mediating impact on tracing the philosophical tradition of the ASM.

In questioning the philosophical foundations Engeström presents for the ASM (Peim, 2009), it is possibly more accurate to describe the ASM as a framework from which methods and theories for analysing activity can be developed (Mwanza, 2002). There is also a question mark over the value of activity theory as a framework, however, with Daniels (cited in Shanahan, 2010) claiming that activity theory has yet to reach its full potential as a framework. Bligh and Flood’s (2017) recent review of activity theory research in higher education reports a number of criticisms of the approach, most notably the idea that it lacks a real analytical focus. In terms of analysing the relationships between elements, the source for identifying contradictions and conflict, Bakhurst (2009) claims the ASM says “almost nothing about the relation that the various components [of the model] bear to one another” (p. 207), arguing that it is not clear what the lines in the ASM represent.

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Rasmussen & Ludvigsen (2009) highlight the difficulty with activity theory in analysing current activity while simultaneously trying to take into consideration historical developments.

Another area of analysis where the ASM has been portrayed as limited is in highlighting politics and power within an activity system. Blackler (1995) notes that activity theory writing lacks discussion around power and politics, while recognising that an activity system can be a contested arena. Martin and Peim (2009) claim that activity system analysis tends to understate the macro socio-political structures that position subjects specifically in relation to the division of labour, with Blackler (2011) going further to suggest that what is missing from an activity theory approach is “an appreciation of power and politics in working relationships and their place in collective development” (p. 725). Another criticism that undermines the value of activity theory is that it is too general. Bakhurst (2009) questions what is meant by activity, claiming that humanity engages in a variety of different types of activities that cannot be lumped together and taken as one. Similarly, Martin and Peim (2009) highlight that the ASM is limited in that it can only be applied when the object, subject and tools are known and predictable.

Another criticism highlighted by Shanahan (2010) and by Bligh and Flood’s (2017) review is the emphasis that CHAT puts on analysis of the collective to the detriment of being able to analyse the experiences of the individuals participating in the same activity. McNicholl and Blake (2013) suggest that the collective focus of CHAT and the failure to recognise that human agency can originate outside the system undermines CHAT’s potential as a transformative tool. With the ASM, Engeström (2015) sought to model Leontiev’s extension of Vygotsky’s subject-artefact-object triangle. Rasmussen and Ludvigsen (2009), however, point out that in focussing on the collective, Engeström is breaking from Leontiev, for whom the object was the focus of individual activity. The human agency aspect of CHAT is also raised by the sociomaterialist perspective, which claims “matter is a critical force in the constitution and recognition of all entities, their relations, and the ways they

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change” (Fenwick, 2010, p. 107) and questions a fundamental distinction between human and non-human. The sociomaterialist perspective would argue that CHAT offers more of a human-centric analysis in its clear distinction of matter as non-human artefacts (Fenwick, 2010). The sociomaterial perspective suggests that analytical insight can be gained by not treating the social and the material as distinct (Orlikowski, 2010) but rather as having equal agency.

The criticisms and limitations of CHAT and the ASM highlighted in the literature—that it is not a theory or methodology, is too generic as a framework, lacks analytical focus, pays insufficient attention to politics and power and places too much emphasis on the collective plane to the detriment of the analysis of the individual and fails to equate human and technological agency—indicate the drawbacks of applying ASM to the analysis of processes, such as the management of the design and development of a blended learning course. As Bakhurst (2009) notes “from the outset you have to be alive to the limits of the model itself. You have to look for “contradictions”, not just within the subject matter the model discloses to you, but between the model and that very subject matter” (p. 207).

### 2.3.3 Activity System terminology: definitions and contestations

CHAT is an evolving analytical framework. As such, there are areas and definitions of CHAT that are contested. The evolving nature of CHAT and some of the contested definitions are discussed here, starting with the progression of CHAT through three generations (Engeström, 2001). First generation CHAT centres on Vygotsky’s idea of mediation and is characterised in the discussion of tools mediating the interaction between the subject and the object (Engeström, 2001). The second generation of CHAT starts with Leontev crucially distinguishing between individual action and collective activity (Engeström, 2001), which Engeström (2015) graphically represented with the ASM (fig 2.2). The third generation of CHAT expands the unit of analysis to cover relations between multiple activity systems (Sannino, 2011), taking two interacting activity systems as the minimum unit of

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analysis. In the studies covered in this literature review, second and third generation CHAT have been utilised. Of the 67 book chapters and articles covered by this literature review, 27 were identified as studies that used CHAT as an analytical framework. Of that 27, only three appear to have used third generation CHAT, with the remaining 24 using second generation CHAT. Obviously the nature of the study changes depending on which generation of CHAT is utilised, although the studies in this review do not always state categorically which generation of CHAT is being used and why they are using second generation or third generation.

In terms of contested definitions used by CHAT, the ambiguity around the definition of the object of the ASM stands out. Above in 2.3.3.1, the object of the ASM was defined as the understanding shared by the subject of what the purpose of the activity is (Shanahan, 2010). However, the term object continues to “bedevil” activity theorists and confuse students (Nardi, 2007, p. 6), as it does not appear to be clear whether object refers to the motive driving the activity or the material thing that the activity is directed toward (Nardi, 2007)? Kaptelinin and Nardi (2006) suggest the confusion dates back to Leontiev’s use of the Russian words *predmet* and *objekt* in *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality* (1978), where *predmet* referred to the objective ‘orientation of activity’ and *objekt* referred to the ‘material reality that had existence’ (cited in Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). Both definitions are translated in English into one word, object, which Kaptelinin & Nardi (2006) suggest is the source of the confusion. They add that the confusion is possibly exasperated by Leontiev’s use of the *predmet* definition as the key concept of the object of activity and Engeström’s use of the *objekt* definition when discussing the object of the activity. Kaptelinin & Nardi (2006) attribute this different interpretation of object to the context—Leontiev was working in psychology, whereas Engeström was working in organisational theory—and the distinction between the subject as an individual, as perceived by Leontiev, and the subject as a community, as perceived by Engeström. Kaptelinin and Nardi (2006) suggest that the reader looks to the context of an activity theory

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study to interpret whether the author is seeing object as objekt, predmet or both.

In the literature reviewed for this thesis, most authors appear to have interpreted object as both objekt and predmet. Bligh & Flood (2015) refer to the object as a 'material thing' but also state that motivation is what transforms the object into an outcome, thereby acknowledging both the objekt and predmet aspects of the object. Amory (2012) consciously distinguishes between the two interpretations of object by using objekt and predmet in his discussion of activity theory. Sannino (2011) relies on Kaptelinin's 2005 (cited in Sannino, 2011) distinction between predmet and objekt in defining the object, whereas Mwanza's (2002) use of the hyphenated object-ive appears to be a mechanism of representing both material object and the object as motive. Although in her eight-step model, Mwanza suggests that researchers using Activity Theory to gather data ask the question 'What is the objective of the activity,' which suggests that Mwanza is presenting object as motive.

Some authors have defined object only as motive, such as Shanahan (2010), Vandenberg (2005) and Hasan and Crawford (2002), who see the object of the activity as the purpose of the activity. Similarly, Oliver (2012) understands object as the intentions of the subject; 'an objective to be achieved,' whereas Mlitwa (2007) defines the object simply as motive. Trowler and Knight's (2000) activity theory informed study of academic staff inductions takes the 1992 definition of activity theory from Hart-Landsberg, Braunger, Reder and Cross (cited in Trowler and Knight, 2000), who interchange the words object and motive.

Other authors stress the material aspects of the object. Objects are targets that subjects attempt to achieve by using tools (Hung et al., 2010). For Joyes and Chen (2007) the object was to develop three online activities. Blin and Munro (2008) see the object as material or ideals and the motive as something separate from the object that drives the transformation of the material or ideal into an outcome. Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2013)

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use Engeström's (1993) definition of object as "the raw material or problem space" (p. 67). The object of Flavin's (2016) study was 'high-quality learning,' for Garraway (2010) the object was 'improved student expertise,' while these objects are ideals rather than material things, they are also not motives. Greenhow & Belbus (2007) state that the object represents the motive or problem space and provides the purpose for which individual actions and goals. However, in their study the object is developing practical and conceptual knowledge of statistical research methods, which could be interpreted as a material thing. Either way, the definition of object within ASMs appears contested and has been interpreted as a motive, a material thing or as a combination of the two.

The definition of contradictions and the use of contradictions in studies that utilise the ASM together constitute another contentious area. According to Engeström & Sannino (2011), the term contradiction has not always been clearly defined in organisational studies. They argue that terms such as contradiction, paradox, dilemma, conflict and double bind have been interchanged, when it is more precise to distinguish between systemic contradictions and their manifestations (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). Engeström & Sannino's (2011) *Types of Discursive Manifestations of Contradictions* describe the features of four manifestations of contradictions—double binds, conflicts, critical conflicts and dilemmas—and outline some what they call 'linguistic cues' that distinguish the manifestation. In the 27 studies included by this review, 23 discuss contradictions but not all make the same distinction between contradictions and their manifestations as Engeström and Sannino (2011) do. Greenhow and Belbus (2007) outline contradictions in an operational mapping table detailing sub-activity systems (p. 374), however the contradictions listed appear to be better described as manifestations of systemic contradictions. McAvinia & Olivier (2004) and McNicholl & Blake (2013) both discuss contradictions as 'arising' from something suggesting that the authors are not distinguishing between root contradictions and their manifestations in day-to-day working life. Similarly Mwanza (2002) outlines how "the contradiction arises as a result of the difficulties employees

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experienced in finding a suitable compromise” (p. 90). Alternatively, Robinson et al. (2005) describes how “dissonance often connects down to underlying, unarticulated contradictions,” and Netteland et al. (2007) discuss how specific tensions and conflicts arise from contradictions in their study of e-learning in large organisations. These authors are distinguishing between contradictions and their manifestation and using the manifestations to better understand the nature of the contradiction. Failing to sufficiently distinguish between contradictions and their manifestations suggests that the actual contradiction, the source of the manifestation, and the initial driver of expansive learning, has not been clearly identified. The inconsistent use of the word ‘contradiction’ in the literature is, therefore, a contested area of CHAT.

The literature review above has outlined the theoretical foundation of CHAT and illustrated how it has been used successfully in studies of organisational behaviour in HE. The review has also revealed some criticisms of CHAT and some contentions and inconsistencies in how CHAT and its terminology is understood and used, which the researcher needs to be cognisant of.

#### 2.3.4 The contribution to knowledge in the field of activity theory and ASM

The literature review of activity theory and the ASM has revealed that the approach appears ideally suited to assessing organisational behaviour in a HE context. However, there appears to be a scarcity of research specific to the meso level of management that is concerned with the development and delivery of courses, and specifically for the development and delivery of blended learning courses. The literature review also reveals a number of challenges to the viability of activity theory and the ASM in organisational contexts. There also appears to be a scarcity of research that sufficiently tests the viability of activity theory and the ASM within the organisational behavioural studies of HEIs and specifically for the development and delivery of blended learning courses.

This research adds to that discussion on the viability of activity theory in organisational behaviour research. It tests some of the known strengths and

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weaknesses that researchers need to be aware of when adopting activity theory as a theoretical framework for assessing organisational behaviour in a HE context. Specifically, it will test the use of aspects of Mwanza's (2002) Activity-Oriented Design Method (AODM) and Engeström & Sannino's (2014) Types of Discursive Manifestations of Contradictions as analytical tools. It also highlights certain aspects of organisational behaviour that were difficult to address using the ASM. Specifically, it adds to the discussion on the apparent failure of activity theory to examine the role of power and the exercising of that power through politics.

#### **2.4 Synthesised messages from the literature review**

To revisit the research questions from the introduction, this three-part literature review has revealed, initially, that there is a scarcity of research specific to the meso level of management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses. Moreover, there does not appear to be a consistent vocabulary or mechanism for comparing different approaches to managing blended learning course development and delivery. However, a typology for comparing management approaches emerged from the second part of the literature review to help address that gap. The literature review has also indicated that CHAT, and specifically the use ASMs, facilitates the researcher in trying to define the nature of the management of blended learning course development and delivery. Together, the management typology and ASMs offer a mechanism to help answer the first research question, which asks how blended learning courses are managed.

The literature review has indicated that ASMs can be used to highlight challenges through identifying primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary contradictions, and, therefore, provide a mechanism for answering the second research question: What are the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses? The ability to identify the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses and indicate how HEIs have responded to those challenges will allow the third research question to be addressed, that is what possible resolutions



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and implications for managing blended learning course development and delivery in the future can be concluded?

The literature review also revealed the manner in which the collegial—new managerial debate is all-encompassing and manifests itself in the different management approaches taken to developing and delivering blended learning courses. The ability to then define those approaches using ASMs allows for the fourth research question to be addressed: How do the responses to these contradictions, as seen in challenges to HEI practices, structures and staff relationships, inform the debate about new managerialism and collegiality in HE? While the literature review highlighted the value of CHAT and ASM for modeling activity in HE, it also revealed a scarcity of studies that test the viability of CHAT and the ASM within the organisational behavioural studies of HEIs, and specifically for the development and delivery of blended learning courses. Therefore, this research can add to the understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of using CHAT and ASMs as theoretical frameworks for organisational studies in HE, which addresses the final research question.

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## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

This chapter will discuss the methodologies to govern the research that were considered, the methods used to collect and analyse data, the framework to underlie those processes and the understanding of knowledge creation that informed the choice of methodology, methods and framework.

### **3.1 Defining Methodology**

The terms methodology and research design can be used in different ways by different writers (Oliver, 2004). For the purpose of this thesis, methodology will refer to the theoretical and practical aspects of conducting the research (Oliver, 2004), thereby covering research approaches and designs based on epistemological and ontological positions and the methods for collecting and analysing data (Trowler, 2012).

### **3.2 The type of study: methodologies considered**

A decision as to which methodological approach to adopt is influenced by, among other factors, the focus of the research, that is discovering the most appropriate way of addressing the specific research question and fulfilling its purposes (Crotty, 2003). Before establishing a clear link between the research aims and the research design adopted, it should be noted that other methodological approaches were considered as potentially appropriate.

#### **3.2.1 Change Theories**

Given the considerable organisational, cultural and technological change outlined in the first two sections of the literature review, it would appear that any research in this area should be framed by theories of change. Nichols (2008) used Rogers' (2003) theory of diffusion to assess whether it was possible to qualitatively measure a HEIs progress toward the sustainable embedding of eLearning. Similarly, Trowler et al. (2013) promote the value of change management theories to make HEI managers aware of what to expect and make them wary of likely unproductive approaches as well as offering a way to view a HEI as "complex practice clusters with differing sets of embedded routine behaviours" (p. 277). However, this research does not

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seek to examine change, either past or future, but rather to get behind the existing practices of a system to see if lessons can be learned that will prove useful in resolving tensions at a macro level.

### 3.2.2 Design Based Research

Design Based Research (DBR) was initially seen as an appropriate methodological approach to guide this study. The initial attractiveness of DBR stemmed from the idea that it is concerned with helping to “create and extend knowledge about developing, enacting and sustaining innovative learning environments” (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003, p. 5). Blended learning course development and delivery can be perceived as an innovative learning environment, and this research seeks to create and/or extend knowledge about how that learning environment is managed. DBR has also been portrayed as an approach that can bridge the gap between research and practice (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013) and, as such, is perceived to be useful to the development of organisational theory (Andriessen, 2007). DBR is also an apt approach in the context of the change process, in that it facilitates design and test interventions (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). While this research is not aimed at developing organisational theory, there is an argument to suggest that one of its outcomes could be to build on organisational theory in a HE context. It is also significant in a DBR context that this research addresses the development and delivery of blended learning courses, which has a design aspect to it. A DBR approach to discovering what organisational issues could have been learned from blended learning course development and delivery, however, would have involved designing, testing and monitoring the implementation of an approach to developing and delivering blended learning courses. Therefore, DBR was ultimately rejected as a methodological because it requires the researcher to start with a proposed solution that is then implemented and tested (Andriessen, 2007), whereas this study has no solution and is concerned more with exploring existing solutions.

### 3.2.3 Action Research

Action Research, which is “specifically geared to changing matters”

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(Denscombe, 2007, p. 122), was also considered as a guiding methodology. Like DBR, Action Research focusses on processes but does not start with a solution, rather “involves fluid and overlapping cycles of investigation, action planning, piloting of new practices, and evaluation of outcomes” (Somekh, 2006 p. 5). Seen, like CHAT, as an interventionist methodology (Sannino & Sutter, 2011), Action Research has been promoted as a mechanism for helping HE managers introduce planned change to achieve a new collegiality that takes into consideration aspects of managerialism and collegiality (Burnes et al., 2014). However, an important aspect of Action Research “is that it is carried out by a partnership of participants who are insiders” (Somekh, 2008 p. 8), and as such is very context based. This study seeks to draw out propositions that are common in more than one setting, which makes Action Research unfeasible because of the time and resources it would take to become a participant researcher in more than one location.

#### 3.2.4 A multiple case study approach: adopted for this study

This research is about attempting to explore how blended learning courses are managed in HEIs, in other words look at happenings within their context. Gray (2009) suggests that case studies are particularly useful when the researcher is trying to expose “the relationship between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring” (2009, p. 247). Similarly, Yin (2009) defines a case study as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Yin’s last point about not clear boundaries further justifies a case study approach because, given that examples from the literature cited above suggest this context to be undefined and unclear.

With this study, the research problem seeks to examine management practices to discover what contradictions and tensions exist. When Russell and Schneiderheinze (2005) sought to examine a complex social situation in an educational context they analysed data from four cases to identify cross-case issues. Similarly, Benson et al. (2008) used multiple cases and analysed

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the data for a comparative study of e-learning. With the proposed research seeking to be explorative rather than comparative, the argument for adopting a multiple case design is that the evidence that emerges from multiple cases could be considered more compelling (Yin, 2009) than from just one case. Plus, the research is not seeking to focus on unusual, rare or revelatory cases but rather derive more generalised propositions with increased applicability, which may be more likely once it can be established that they emerged from more than one case. The selection of three cases probably increases the workload to the limit of what is possible in the time of this study, however, the selection of more than two cases blunts the potential criticism and scepticism of the “uniqueness or artifactual conditions” surrounding the use of a single case (Yin, 2009, p. 61). The intention with this research is to look at multiple cases and then draw a single set of cross-case conclusions (Yin, 2009).

### **3.3 A brief overview of the research design**

This is a multiple case study exploring the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses in three HEIs in Ireland. How the processes, people and tools behind the development and delivery of blended learning courses are managed is explored within the context of contrasting management approaches: new managerialism and collegiality. The collection of data is guided by AODM (Mwanza, 2011), an activity theory—based iterative approach initially constructed to operationalise Engeström’s ASM to support Human Computer Interaction research and design processes (Mwanza, 2001). Data has been gathered and analysed from semi-structured interviews with staff involved in the development and delivery of blended learning courses at the three Irish HEIs and accompanying publicly available documentation used to support and direct courses at those HEIs. This data informs the development of three blended learning activity systems (BLASs), through which the data will be analysed.

### **3.4 The relationship between the research design and the research aims**

The aim of the research is to explore the challenges of managing blended learning courses to see what that exploration has to say about the new managerialism—collegiality debate. The purpose of the case studies is to

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“illuminate the general by looking at the particular” (Denscombe, 2014, p. 54). The case studies illuminate the general by focussing on one or a few instances of a phenomenon and looking in-depth at the processes, people and experiences (Denscombe, 2014). The decision to opt for a multiple case study, as opposed to a single case study, is based on the desire to gain generalisable applicable results. However, the real value of case studies is to “unravel the complexities of a given situation” (Denscombe, 2014, p. 55), so a balance is being struck between delving sufficiently in-depth to view the complexities of a situation while countering the argument that case studies are too subjective or too site specific by looking at more than one case. Gray (2009) suggests that case studies are particularly useful when the researcher is trying to expose “the relationship between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring” (2009, p. 247). With this research, the phenomenon is the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses and the context is the new managerialism—collegiality debate. Therefore the research questions are:

1. How are blended learning courses managed as activity systems in selected Irish HEIs?
2. What are the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses as identified as contradictions in the analysis of the three ASMs?
3. What possible resolutions and implications for managing blended learning course development and delivery in the future can be concluded?
4. How do the responses to these contradictions, as seen in changes to HEI practices, structures and staff relationships, inform the debate about new managerialism and collegiality in HE?
5. What new understandings of CHAT as a theoretical framework can be garnered from applying the ASM to blended learning course management in HE?

An exploration of the people, processes and tools behind the development and delivery of blended learning courses' activity system (BLAS) is required in

order to explore the management of that activity, so some of the more specific questions arising from the research are:

- Who manages BLAS course development and delivery?
- What strategies are employed by such managers?
- Does managing a BLAS course differ from managing a face-to-face course?
- What is the nature of the subject of the BLAS?
- Who is involved in the development and delivery of BLAS courses?
- What processes are followed in BLAS?
- What tools are utilised by the people involved to support the BLAS processes?
- How are those people, processes and tools managed?
- What are the challenges in managing a BLAS?

The research questions, methods and tools for analysis are summarised in table 3.1.

Research Question	Method	Analysis
1. How are blended learning courses managed as activity systems in selected Irish HEIs?	Interviews and Document Review	AODM-ASM
2. What are the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses as identified as contradictions in the analysis of the three ASMs?	Interviews and Document Review	ASM and Manifestations of Contradictions
3. What possible resolutions and implications for managing blended learning course development and delivery in the future can be concluded?	Interviews and Document Review	ASM and Manifestations of Contradictions and blended learning management typology
4. How do the responses to these contradictions, as seen in changes to HEI practices, structures and staff relationships, inform the debate about new managerialism and collegiality in HE?	Interviews and Document Review	ASM and Blended learning management typology
5. What new understandings of CHAT as a theoretical framework can be garnered from applying the ASM to blended learning course management in HE?	Interviews and Document Review	ASM and Blended learning management typology

Table 3.1 Research questions, methods and analysis

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### 3.4.1 ASM and AODM

The ASM was designed as a conceptual mechanism for analysing activity (Engeström, 2015) by breaking down activity into elements and modelling how those elements might relate to each other.

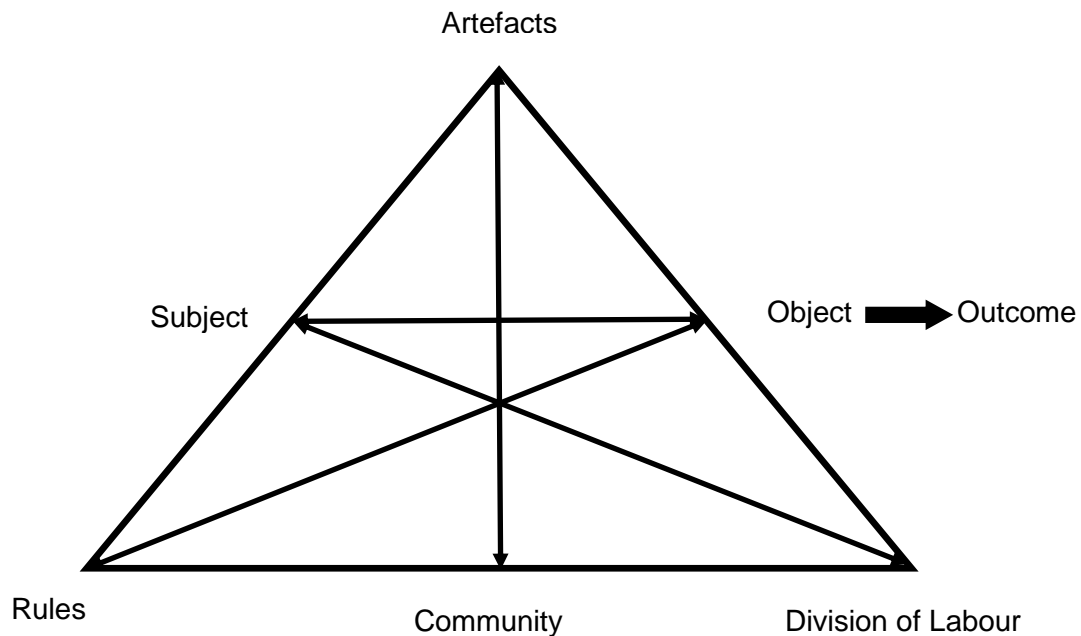


Fig. 3.1 Activity Systems Model (Engeström, 2015)

In doing so, the ASM approach calls on the researcher to structure the activity, the relationships between elements of the activity system, the objective of the activity and the mediating role of artefacts, rules and regulations, community and the division of labour on the activity. In the literature review above, it was shown how CHAT was used to frame research concerned with a number of subjects in organisational studies of HE. The practical research rationale as to why CHAT was used in those studies included its value as a theoretical lens (Benson & Whitworth, 2007; Karasavvidis, 2010), to frame questions to explore (Joyes & Chen, 2007), as a mechanism to guide analysis (Netteland et al., 2007; Oliver, 2012; Osorio et al., 2012, McAvinia & Oliver, 2004), to conceptualise people's behaviour (Mwanza & Engeström, 2003; Karasavvidis, 2009), to describe processes in more detail (Mwanza, 2002; McAvinia & Oliver, 2004) to identify tensions and contradictions (Prenkert, 2006 Netteland et al., 2007) and to analyse seemingly contradictory discourses (McNicholl &



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Blake, 2013). This research is concerned with breaking down and exploring an activity, the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses, that is taking place in the midst of two seemingly contradictory discourses, new managerialism and collegiality. Therefore, CHAT appears to be an appropriate theoretical framework to adopt for such research.

The AODM is a toolkit to guide the researcher in the process of structuring an activity. The toolkit consists of four aspects: an eight step model; an activity notation; a technique of generating research questions, which are used to identify contradictions, and a technique of mapping operational processes. The conception and operational structure of AODM is based on the acceptance of Engeström's (2015) expanded model of human activity as a representation that captures and unifies key fundamental principles of activity theory (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006) into a unified whole. Engeström's approach, suggests that tensions are commonplace within distributed work systems and that these paradoxes, incoherencies and conflicts provide a potential driving force for change (Blackler, 1995). The methods of AODM provide an analytic scheme for identifying the essential elements of an activity and for examining their interrelationships (Greenhow & Belbus, 2007). The AODM has been widely used to investigate technology enhanced learning and design (Mwanza, 2011). The toolkit, or aspects of it, has also been used to investigate collaborative knowledge building practices among course design teams and their students (Greenhow & Belbus, 2007) and for categorising learning experiences (Mwanza, 2011). Although the AODM does not appear to have been used to explore BLASs, it does offer a potential roadmap for research into HE organisational processes that can guide data collection and analysis and, in doing so, operationalise the use of CHAT as a theoretical framework in this context. As noted above, Mwanza's (2011) use of AODM does not clearly distinguish between contradictions and their manifestations, neither does Greenhow & Belbus's (2007) study, which also utilised AODM. For that reason, the aspect of the analysis that involves the search for contradictions and their manifestations in the three BLAS case studies will be

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guided by Engeström & Sannino's (2014) Types of Discursive Manifestations of Contradictions (p. 375), which defines four types of manifestations—double bind, conflict, critical conflict and dilemma—and their linguistic cues.

### **3.5 Choice of cases: study context**

When considering the rationale behind case selection, the overriding influence was the logic of literal replication, that is, to select cases where it is possible to predict similar results (Yin, 2009). Publicly funded higher education in Ireland can be subdivided into universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education. At the time of the start of this research, there were 7 Universities, 14 Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and 7 Colleges of Education (Department of Education and Skills, 2017), and, although the colleges of education have since become constituent parts of the universities, they still retain a sense of individual identity given that the move to become part of the universities is recent. There are also a number of private colleges operating in the sector. The IoTs, which emerged from the creation of a vocational education sector in the 1970s and 80s (Hazelkorn & Harkin, 2014) “operate a unique system in that they allow students to progress from two year (associate degree programmes) through primary degree to Masters and PhD” (THEA, 2017). The universities and the IoTs operate quite differently. They are governed by separate legislation, the Irish Universities Act of 1997 and the Institutes of Technology Act of 2006, and have separate representative bodies, the IUA and THEA. Academics in the IoTs would also have different terms and conditions and teaching loads compared to university staff (HEA, 2014b)

In pursuit of literal replication, the initial thought was to seek cases from the same part of the sector, that is all universities, all IoTs or all private colleges. From experience, however it appears that blended learning can be managed quite differently between HEIs in the same subdivision of the HE sector and even between disciplines within the same HEI. There did not appear to be an IoT model for blended learning, a university model and a private sector model. Where there did appear to be similarity was in aspiration and organisational structure. In the performance compacts of 2014-2016 between Irish HEIs and

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the Irish HEA referred to in the introduction, some publicly funded HEIs made commitments to increase their blended learning courses or numbers of students on blended learning course. Twenty five Irish HEIs committed to Compact Performance agreements with the HEA in 2014 to be fulfilled by 2016. For the task of case selection, the 25 HEIs were grouped together based on a text analysis of the 2014-2016 compacts. The text analysis involved looking for mentions of the words blended, online, TEL and elearning and their derivatives within the compacts and comparing each of the targets set for flexible, distance and blended learning students (sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the compacts). Eight HEIs were identified as having made commitments under the compacts with the HEA to deliver on measurable targets for blended learning courses. One of the factors that influenced the idea of grouping HEIs based on aspiration and commitment came from activity theory and the notion that different activities are distinguished by different objectives. By grouping the HEIs according to blended learning course development by aspiration as illustrated in the compacts, the hope was that the activity systems in the selected HEIs were working toward a similar objective.

Having categorised the HEIs by aspiration, a review of the known structures that existed within each HEI to drive and support the development of blended learning courses was taken into consideration. Within the eight HEIs grouped together by aspiration, some HEIs appeared to have more similar organisational approaches to developing blended learning courses than others. The HEIs in this subgroup each had a designated technology enhanced learning, elearning, or blended learning service. Most of these services existed as part of larger centralised Teaching and Learning Units within the HEI. Another factor in case selection was the cohort for blended learning courses, which was work-based, part-time students. Again activity theory, and specifically the emphasis on defining activity systems, influenced the use of organisational structure as a criteria in selecting cases that were in some way similar and were likely to produce similar results.

The list of 25 potential publicly funded HEIs was ultimately reduced to six

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using aspiration as documented in the 2014-16 compacts and organisational structure as the defining criteria and target cohort. Data was gathered from all six HEIs. One HEI was used as a pilot and, of the remaining five, the three cases from which it was practically possible to collect the most data were used in the study.

### **3.6 ASM analysis data collection methods**

In the studies included in the CHAT part of the literature review above that discussed methods, McNicholl & Blake (2013) used interviews, work diary, observation and a participatory data analysis workshop; Gómez & Duarte, (2012) used a survey and interviews; Netteland et al., (2007) used observation, field notes, document analysis and interviews; Oliver (2012) used interviews and Prenkert (2007) used interviews, document analysis and observation. For this study, the selected methods were semi-structured interviews with HEI staff and analysis of publicly available documents that were related to the selected HEIs development and delivery of blended learning courses. Observation and surveys were considered as additional methods of collecting data. Observation was rejected because it was felt that access to observe management practices would not be granted as the data would be deemed too commercially sensitive. This decision not to use observation was informed by conversations with management at the pilot site, when it was stated that access to observe practices would likely not be granted to a blended learning practitioner from another Irish HEI. Even if access to observe was granted, it was felt that it would have been difficult, near on impossible, to then protect the anonymity of the HEI and participants being observed. A survey was rejected because of the difficulty in posing questions that would have gained insight into the management of blended learning practices. This concern was borne out during the semi-structured interviews when the concept of a blended learning course, or any course, being “managed” was not easily conceived by participants. Again the decision not to use a survey was influenced by the pilot experience, when during interviews with participants the concept of course development and delivery being managed had to be repeatedly explained and clarified. Therefore,

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practical, access and anonymisation issues were the factors in restricting the methods for data collection to semi-structured interviews and publicly available documents.

Publicly available official HEI documents were used because it was felt they would help define and describe each ASM in that they provide context, offer an indication as to institutional motivation behind blended learning and better define the organisational processes that the development and delivery of blended learning courses go through. There is also the potential for the official documentation to complement or contradict the thoughts expressed by the interviewees, thereby helping to triangulate the data gathered. The publicly available documents were downloaded from the HEI's web sites. Documents were collected depending on if they related to blended course development and delivery. Meeting that criteria often meant including documents that may not have specifically referred to blended learning but which somehow would have touched on the development and delivery of blended learning. Documents were included in the analysis if they related to rules, regulations or guidelines around course development and delivery, including assessment strategy; course approval policies and procedures; HEI strategic objectives; use of the Learning Management Systems and the use of educational technology and digital teaching content.

The HEI websites were also the source of identifying potential interview participants. Who should be interviewed from any individual HEI was determined by the pilot study, for which a number of professional and academic staff were interviewed. A decision was made early on in the study not to consult students. This decision was based on the experience that student input to the management of the development and delivery of BL courses was minimal. Collecting feedback from students on blended learning courses was common across the six HEIs, and there was evidence in the documents of the feedback being considered when developing and delivering blended learning courses. However, students themselves did not appear to be involved in making or implementing those decisions.

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### 3.6.1 Sampling strategy and participants

Purposive sampling, which involves the researcher taking a strategic approach to selecting participants using specific criteria (Bryman, 2015), was adopted to identify who to approach to be interviewed. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research and employed in many applied studies (Ritchie et al., 2013). The choice of criteria used to purposively select participants can emerge from the aims of the study and the literature review (Ritchie et al., 2013). The aim for this study is to learn more about how blended learning courses are managed, so the primary factor in determining who should be invited to participate in the study was the extent to which potential participants were involved in the development and delivery of blended learning courses. The second part of the literature review contains a discussion on the roles involved in developing and delivering blended learning courses. In that discussion, it appeared that there could be a range of people from academics working on their own to a collaborative multidisciplinary team involving several roles. One of the purposes of the pilot study was to try and determine which were the important roles that needed to be included in the main study in order to assess how course development and delivery was managed. Therefore, for the pilot, a head of department, an educational developer, an instructional designer, an academic teaching on a blended learning course and a professional coordinator responsible for managing the use of educational technology were interviewed. The experience of the pilot revealed that the key role in managing the development and delivery of the blended learning course was course coordinator, although three of the five people interviewed described themselves as either course coordinators or the person responsible for managing the course. The pilot also revealed that there appeared to be an overlap in the role of the educational developer and the instructional designer. It was also noted from the pilot that the academic who was deemed the course coordinator was often a teacher on the blended learning course with responsibility for one or more modules. Again, based on the experience of the pilot, the discipline-based head of department appeared not to have a major role in managing the development and delivery of the blended learning course once participating academic staff had been identified

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and hours had been allocated. It was decided not to interview any academic heads of department, but to see the subjects, in the activity theory sense of the word, as being the course coordinator, who could potentially be an academic or a professional member of staff. Following on from the pilot, it was decided that for each case study, a professional coordinator and an academic coordinator, who were involved in developing and delivering blended learning courses, would be interviewed, together with an instructional designer or educational developer and an academic teaching on a blended learning course. It was also decided to include a senior HEI manager, with responsibility for blended learning courses, as a participant to get the institutional view of the nature of managing a blended learning course. The need to protect individual and institutional anonymity during this study restricts the ability to discuss the characteristics of the participants who were interviewed in too great detail. However, over the three cases, three professional coordinators, three academic coordinators, three senior managers, three academics teaching on blended learning courses and two instructional designers/educational developers were interviewed. It should also be noted that those interviewed often spoke from more than one perspective, for example the academic course coordinator may also have offered the perspective of an academic teaching on the course and a professional coordinator may also be able to talk from the perspective of an educational developer/instructional designer.

### 3.6.2 CHAT ASM Interviews

An email seeking institutional permission to approach HEI staff was sent first. For the first HEI, informal queries led to a formal request for institutional permission to approach staff to be sent to the human resource (HR) department. The HR manager granted institutional permission but stated that requests to staff were to be submitted through the HR office. The HR office sent out the participant information sheet (Appendix Three) and the Consent form (Appendix Three) to all staff, with the researcher's contact details. No staff from this HEI contacted the researcher, however. At a second HEI, institutional access permission (Appendix Three) was sent to both the HR

department and the Registrar's Office. However, neither replied. On the advice of a colleague, institutional access permission requests were sent to the chairperson of the ethics committee together with the Participant Information Sheet, Participant Consent Form and a copy of ethical approval from the Lancaster University Ethics Committee. This approach led to institutional access being granted at two HEIs. For the other two participating HEIs, permission was given via the Registrar's Office. On receipt of institutional permission, individuals were approached by email with the participant information sheet and the consent form (Appendix Three). Participants were not given sight of the prepared questions prior to the interview. Most interviews were conducted over the phone. Two interviews took place by skype and three interviews took place face-to-face. The preference to interviewing by phone was influenced by the experience of the pilot, when it appeared that telephone or skype interviews helped with anonymity. Face-to-face interviews, especially when visiting a site, required a level of explanation that made protecting institutional and individual anonymity more difficult.

The interviews were semi-structured. For the pilot, eight questions were prepared (Appendix Four) and delivered at each interview, based on the Mwanza's (2002) eight step model.

<b>Activity Theory Component</b>	<b>Questions to ask</b>
Activity Theory Component	What sort of activity am I interested in?
Objective	Why is this activity taking place?
Subjects	Who is involved in carrying out this activity?
Tools	By what means are the subjects carrying out this activity?
Rules and Regulations	Who is responsible for what, when carrying out this activity and how are the roles organised?
Division of Labour	Are there any cultural norms, rules and regulations governing the performance of this activity?
Community	What is the environment in which activity is carried out
Outcome	What is the desired outcome from this activity?

Table. 3.2 Mwanza (2002, p. 86) Eight Step Model



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Decomposing the activity system for the pilot using Activity Notation from the AODM, the relationships between subject-tool-object, subject-rules-object and subject-division of labour-object appeared to have increased significance over other sub-triangles in the system. As a result of applying Activity Notation, questions relating to those sub-triangles were added to the prepared list of eight questions about the activity system components. Additional questions relating to the nature of the participant's role were also asked. Other questions emerged iteratively during the interview, but they tended to be in search of clarification or as a means to reflect back to the interviewees what they had said in response to the prepared questions.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Data analysis seeks to explore the data in a manner that will allow the research questions to be addressed. Analysing the data by categorising it according to the elements of the ASM and then constructing a BLAS for each case illustrated how blended learning courses are managed at the selected HEIs. Identifying manifestations of contradictions within the BLAS and tracing them back to systemic contradictions highlighted the challenges of the management practices adopted at each HEI. Transplanting the BLAS and the challenges on to the management of blended learning courses typology identified in the literature review (Table 5.2) illustrated how the practices and challenges inform the clash between new managerialism and collegiality and led to suggestions as to how they may be resolved.

During the pilot, documents and interview transcripts were analysed, with the idea that the emerging codes and themes could be used to define the activity system. Trying to transplant emerging codes, categories and themes into the activity system or even to use the ASM to analyse the emerging themes (Oliver, 2012) proved difficult to the extent that it was not possible to define the activity system with this approach. The difficulties experienced in seeking to take emerging codes and themes and analyse them using the elements of an ASM formed the basis of a presentation on the pilot project delivered at The Next Generation: Digital Learning Research Symposium in November

2016. (<https://ni4dl.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/final-research-symposium-proceedings.pdf>). Conversations with fellow researchers using CHAT led to this approach to analysis being dropped in favour of using the elements of the ASM as predefined categories and assigning the categories to the text of the interview transcripts. The idea of using the elements of the ASM as predefined categories for analysis was extended into the analysis of the documents. As stated, documents were downloaded from the HEIs web site and the elements of the ASM were assigned to extracts where it was felt that the documents discussed aspects relevant to those elements. The BLAS for each of the three sites was then constructed from the text of the interview transcripts and documents as categorised by the elements defined in Engeström’s ASM.

The next part of the analysis was to explore contradictions within each defined BLAS. Initially, the approach was to use the three BLASs to devise a composite BLAS through which it would be possible to identify systemic contradictions that would be generalisably applicable. However, the BLASs that were devised proved too different to form the basis of a composite model and were, therefore, analysed for contradictions separately. The search for contradictions and their manifestations within each BLAS was guided by Engeström & Sannino’s (2011) Types of Discursive Manifestations of Contradictions (p. 375), within which the authors offer examples of linguistic cues to indicate the different types of manifestation. Transcripts and documents were scanned for linguistic cues (Table 3.2) of the four discursive manifestations—double bind, critical conflict, conflict and dilemma.

Manifestation	Features	Linguistic cues
Double bind	Facing pressing and equally unacceptable alternatives in an activity system	“we”, “us”, “we must”, “we have to” pressing rhetorical questions, expressions of helplessness
Critical Conflict	Facing contradictory motives in social interaction, feeling violated or guilty	Personal, emotional, moral accounts narrative structure, vivid metaphors
Conflict	Arguing, criticizing	“no”, “I disagree”, “this is not true”
Dilemma	Expression or exchange of incompatible evaluations	“on the one hand[...] on the other hand”; “yes, but”

Table 3.3 Types of Discursive Manifestations of Contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2014 p. 375)

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Engeström & Sannino (2014) suggest that a computer program or the Find function in Microsoft Word could be a useful way of identifying some of the linguistic cues. However, a line-by-line re-reading of the transcripts and documents to identify examples of the linguistic cues was adopted because of a fear that incidents of words taken out of context might result in a misunderstanding of the linguistic cue. Engeström & Sannino (2014) do not suggest that there is a direct 'mechanical' link between the occurrence of a linguistic cue and a manifestation, however, they do suggest that "a high frequency or heavy concentration of some cues in some parts of the discourse may in itself be an indication of something important that is not fully captured by looking only at the actual manifestations" (Engeström & Sannino's, 2014, p. 375). In their study, Engeström & Sannino (2014) drew a line linking occurrences of critical conflicts and primary contradictions and occurrences of double binds and secondary contradictions. Engeström & Sannino's (2014) approach is, therefore, used to identify and define contradictions through the manifestations of those contradictions in the language of the participants interviewed.

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### **3.8 Ontological and epistemological issues: Pragmatism**

As well as being influenced by the purpose of the research, the choice of methodology is influenced by the theoretical perspective of the researcher (Gray, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) defines theoretical perspective as the philosophical stance informing the methodology (p. 3), within which is embedded an epistemology, or theory of knowledge. Crotty (1998) outlines different approaches to epistemology: objectivism, which says that knowledge or meaning is there to be discovered in the world and its objects; constructionism, which says that knowledge or meaning emerges or is constructed when the consciousness engages with objects and the world, and subjectivism, which would say that knowledge or meaning is imposed upon objects and the world by individuals. Of these three approaches, this researcher leans toward constructionism and an understanding that knowledge is created by an engagement of consciousness and the world. However, there is also a nagging concern preventing this researcher from committing to this view of the creation of meaning, which is a need to accept and acknowledge multiple perspectives and not to get stuck in ideological positions.

Being a child of the ideological political battles of the 1970s and 1980s, who was very much immersed in those battles without ever really being convinced of the validity of the battle, led this researcher to mistrust and be suspicious of any ideology, or, for that matter, any position that was too fervently adhered to. While the so-called third-way that emerged in the 1990s appeared initially attractive, it too seemed to morph into an ideology and, therefore, came to be mistrusted. Since then, this researcher has been seeking for a way of viewing the world that was largely free of ideological bias. Long before being introduced to the concept of pragmatism, this researcher was viewing the world in terms of what works; consciously disregarding and downgrading any effort to explain or rationalise from first principles, but rather looking to results and outcomes to see what works and then accepting the idea that the outcome works as being in itself sufficient justification.

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Pragmatism is difficult to define, possibly because it is complex and emergent and is relevant for a number of disciplines (McCaslin, 2008). Moreover, there does not appear to be a consensus on what distinguishes pragmatism from other philosophical movements (Nicholson, 2013). Definition can also be problematic given that not even its founding fathers, Peirce, James and Dewey, could speak of pragmatism in unison (Malachowski, 2013). While a definition is difficult, a starting point can be what has come to be regarded as the pragmatist's statement made by one of the founding fathers, Pierce, who asks us to "consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Pierce, 1878). In other words, the object is wholly conceived through our conception of its practical effects. While Peirce, James and Dewey found little agreement in their philosophical views, they did all agree that "the pragmatic approach can best be described as a habit of mind, an attitude, or a disposition of being open to new ideas and experiences, rather than as a definitive solution to philosophical problems" (Nicholson, 2013). Nicholson (2013) goes on to identify three characteristics of this attitude: a willingness to accept doubt and uncertainty, an openness to change, and a recognition of a wide plurality of perspectives (Nicholson, 2013). In terms of theoretical perspective, these three characteristics of pragmatism best represent this researcher's view of the world. Add to that the idea that a pragmatist, as opposed to an ideologue, "can mean a person who is not wedded to a particular school of thought and takes an open-minded approach to solving problems by using ideas from a variety of sources" (Nicholson, 2013), and it is easy to see how this researcher's current view of the world aligns with pragmatism.

In terms of research methodology and epistemology, pragmatism is less easily aligned. Pragmatism is difficult to comprehend epistemologically because it is concerned with ontological positions. It is not concerned with the creation of meaning but the nature of truth. A pragmatist comprehends truth not as "an absolute but a movable and usable construct for understanding the nature of

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reality” (McCaslin, 2008, p. 672). For the pragmatist, truth is seen as relational and situational (McCaslin, 2008). In practice, the pragmatist researcher uses multiple approaches, looking to what works and acknowledges the importance of the research question over the methods used (Creswell 2008). This emphasis on results over methods leaves pragmatists exposed to criticisms of a lack of consideration of epistemological concerns, such as validity and reliability (McCaslin, 2008). However, McCaslin (2008) also argues that the philosophical position of pragmatism holds “that truth is co-created by way of intersubjective relationships” and that this “co-created truth is epistemologically valid because it is co-constructed by the collective experience” (McCaslin, 2008). This research sought to strive for validity and credibility from exploring a collective experience. Participants were purposively selected because they filled different roles relating to blended learning. More often than not, it emerged that individual participants could offer multiple perspectives either because they were currently filling more than one role, for example course co-ordinator and lecturer, or they had experience of holding different roles; the instructional designer who became a professional co-ordinator, or the lecturer who became an educational developer etc. Therefore, the collective experience of participants interviewed added validity to the data collected. Validity and credibility were also served by including document analysis as part of the data collection. The official documentation served to provide context to participants’ contributions, while also reinforcing and, sometimes, contradicting data collected from interviews. In addition to the epistemological validity from co-construction by the collective experience, Crotty (1998) offers epistemological grounding to the pragmatist theoretical perspective by portraying it as emerging from constructionism, where “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 2003, p. 43).

It should also be noted that there are commonalities between CHAT and pragmatism. Hegel, whose rejection of Dualism formed the origins of CHAT (Engeström, 2015), was quite significant to pragmatism’s trio of founding fathers, especially Dewey (Bernstein, 2013). While acknowledging

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differences, Miettinen (2006) also identifies that both pragmatism and CHAT “recognize the primacy of the idea of practical activity and the changing nature of reality” (p. 4) and that both are committed to changing the world practically (Miettinen, 2006). These commonalities suggest that there may be grounds for seeing CHAT as a methodological continuation of the pragmatic theoretical perspective. While that may be a stretch, the alignment of this researcher’s theoretical perspective with pragmatism was almost definitely a factor in deciding to use a CHAT—inspired model to collect and analyse data. That said, the pragmatic influenced theoretical perspective raises a note of caution in relation to this research, given the link between pragmatism and new managerialism raised by Meek et al. (2010), who see new managerialism as in part based on pragmatism, rather than a humanist ideology of management, “where one has to do whatever has to be done in a way that gives the best results with the least resources.” Coming to the research from a pragmatist’s theoretical perspective may have some alignment with CHAT but, the researcher needs to be aware of, and compensate for, a perceived bias toward new managerialism as a result of coming from a pragmatic theoretical perspective.

### **3.9 Ethical Issues**

“Informed consent, confidentiality and protection of individuals are central to guidelines on research ethics” (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight. 2010, p. 164). It is important to acknowledge in this case that those three ethical considerations extend to the organisations being researched as well as the participating individuals. Moreover, another aspect of ethical consideration is ensuring that the protection afforded the individual and organisation is comprehensive and that any consent granted is not exceeded, which is of particular consideration when seeking protection at the organisation level, where the research may stray beyond the remit of the consent.

Prior to collecting data from participants, individual and organisation research agreements were sought in the form of consent forms and information sheets outlining the research prior to research beginning (Appendix Three). These agreements included such ethical considerations as voluntary informed

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consent, the right to withdraw, mechanism for recording data, the potential use of such data and the right to review and comment on the data. Approval for the research, including the proposed research agreements, was granted by Lancaster University ethical committee.

The concerns raised by the ethics committee were with regard to the protection of anonymity. Anonymity concerns were shared by a number of potential participants, to the point where some potential participants refused to be involved in the research or withdrew during data collection. An argument put forward by more than one potential participant was that Ireland is a small country and that the blended learning community in Ireland was so small that it would be near impossible to assure institutional and individual anonymity. Countering that perceived threat to anonymity was one of the reasons behind gathering data from twice as many HEIs as were used in the study. As stated in case selection, six HEIs were approached for institutional permission to gather data, and data was gathered from all six. One site was used as a pilot case, and data from two others was discarded because insufficient data could be gathered and/or insufficient personnel gave consent to be interviewed. While the institutions and individuals who participated in the study may be known to members of the Irish blended learning community, only the researcher knows which HEIs were the three used in the study. Protecting anonymity was also behind a decision to interview primarily by phone or Skype. Some face-to-face interviews took place, but visiting participating HEIs became difficult to explain without divulging the nature of the study. This was also a concern raised by the ethics committee. Ultimately, of the interviews that took place, 18% were conducted face-to-face. In order to further protect anonymity, the specific number of interviews that took place at each HEI is also not being revealed. Of the ethical issues under consideration, preserving the anonymity of the HEI and participants became paramount. While these considerations restricted both the methods of data collection and the number of participants to be interviewed, it should also be acknowledged that this research does cover commercially sensitive information. The need to protect an institution's reputation and commercially



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sensitive information could, in itself, be interpreted as another consequence of a new managerialist ethos seeping into the HE sector in Ireland.

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## Chapter 4 Presenting the Data and Data Analysis

### 4.1. Introduction

The analysis consists of presenting a BLAS for each of the three cases, accompanied by a description of that BLAS. The BLAS is described by discussing and contextualising each element of the BLAS individually using the words of the participants and the HEI's documents. The outcome of each BLAS, that is what each BLAS has achieved, is then defined using the attributes in the typology for blended learning management and by answering the questions posed in Table 2.5, which will allow the HEI to be positioned on the blended learning course management spectrum.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Rationale	What was the primary motive behind developing the course?
Driver	Was the development top-down or bottom-up driven?
Organised	Was development organised centrally or decentrally?
Leader	Who led the development?
Staff Dynamic	What was the relationship between those involved in developing the course?
Development process	Was the course developed systematically or iteratively?

Table 2.5 Blended Learning Course Management Attributes

The next part of the analysis looks to identify Engestrom's (2015) four types of contradiction that can occur with an ASM. Primary and secondary contradictions are identified by examining the interview transcripts and documents to identify two of the four manifestations of contradictions outlined by Engestrom & Sannino's (2011).

Manifestation	Features	Linguistic cues
Double bind	Facing pressing and equally unacceptable alternatives in an activity system: Resolution: practical transformation (going beyond words)	“we”, “us”, “we must”, “we have to” pressing rhetorical questions, expressions of helplessness
Critical Conflict	Facing contradictory motives in social interaction, feeling violated or guilty	Personal, emotional, moral accounts narrative structure, vivid metaphors

Table 4.1 Manifestation of contradictions (Engestrom & Sannino, 2011).

Critical conflicts indicate the existence of systemic primary contradictions, whereas evidence of double binds is used to identify secondary contradictions, which emerge as a response to the efforts within each BLAS to overcome the primary contradiction (Engestrom & Sannino, 2011). Efforts to overcome these double binds then lead to tertiary contradictions between each BLAS and an earlier version of the activity system. For the purposes of this analysis, the earlier version of the activity system is an activity system for developing and delivering face-to-face courses. Efforts to overcome tertiary contradictions by each BLAS lead to quaternary contradictions, that is, contradictions between the BLAS and a neighbouring activity. There are four types of neighbouring activities identified by Engestrom (2015), object activities, instrument activities, subject-producing activities and rule producing activities. The neighbouring activity selected to assess quaternary contradictions is a rule producing activity, which is a neighbouring activity that produces rules for the BLAS.

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## 4.2. Definitions

It should be noted that this analysis is framed by second generation CHAT, in that it will assess the BLAS for each case as an individual activity system and not cover relations between multiple activity systems. As stated above, the definition of the object of an activity system is contested, given the dual understanding of object as objective (predmet) and object as material object (objekt). For the purposes of this analysis, both the objective (predmet) and material object (objekt) will be separately defined within each BLAS, in order to avoid confusion as to whether the object relates to a material object or an objective. The term object-ive (Mwanza, 2002) will be used outside the BLASs when discussing the object to include the dual nature of the term. The subject within the BLAS is defined as the person or persons from whose perspective the BLAS is being assessed. The subject is the person or persons who have agency; that is who have the capacity to manage the development and delivery of the blended learning courses.

Participants in this study used a number of different terms and labels to refer to the same or similar phenomenon. Therefore, in pursuit of clarity and consistency, this study will use just one term for each phenomenon. The title, the first column of Table 4.2, lists the terms that will be used during the analysis and discussion of the data. Table 4.2 also offers a definition of each term, for the purposes of this analysis, and a list of corresponding alternative terms and synonyms that were used by the participants interviewed and the documents consulted.

Title	Description	Alternatives/Synonyms						
		Tutor	Lecturer	Teacher	Subject Matter Expert	Content writer	Content Developer	
Academic	Teaches one or more modules on a blended learning course, prepares teaching material, delivers lectures and tutorials, sets and mark assessments and provides feedback to students							
Educational Technologist	Creates and/or reviews reusable learning objects (RLOs), provides training for academics on educational technologies	Instructional Designer	Technical Writer	Educational Technician				
Professional Coordinator	Professional member of staff, who works in or oversees a non-discipline centralised unit that is involved in blended learning course development and delivery	E-Learning Coordinator	Manager of Lifelong Learning	Blended Learning Coordinator	Flexible Learning Manager	Programme Coordinator	Project Manager	
Academic Coordinator	Academic member of staff who oversees a discipline-based course and often teaches on the course	Programme Coordinator	Course Supervisor	Lead Lecturer	Senior Lecturer			
Educational Developer	Academic experienced at online/blended learning who mentors or guides other academic staff on using educational technology/Curriculum design.	eLeader	eChampion	Online Education Mentor				
Computer Technician	IT services personnel	IT support	Computer Services					
Copywriter	Reviews content from an academic for plagiarism, referencing errors, house style, correct format etc.	Technical Writer	Instructional Designer	Educational Technologist	Desktop Publisher			
HEI	Higher Education Institute	University	College	Institute of Technology				
LMS	Learning Management System	Virtual Learning Environment	Blackboard	Moodle	Content Management System			
TEL Unit	Formal or informal unit, usually within a T&L unit, that specialises in Educational Technologies	E-Learning Unit	Online Centre	Blended Unit	Centre for Educational Technologies			
T&L Unit	Department usually reporting to the Registrar/Vice President for Academic Affairs, responsible for promoting quality teaching among academic staff	Education Centre	Centre for Teaching and Learning	Teaching and Learning Department				

Table 4.2 Blended learning development and delivery terminology

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### **4.3. HEI A**

HEI A has a strategy for developing blended learning, which has as its primary aim to enhance student centred learning through educational technologies. In HEI A, blended learning courses are developed and delivered on a discipline basis. They are managed by a discipline-based academic coordinator, who typically teaches on the course and reports to the head of the department. HEI A has a Teaching and Learning (T&L) Unit that includes a professional coordinator who has a responsibility for the HEI's blended learning strategy. HEI A also has discipline-based educational developers, who are academic staff who have been allocated hours to support blended learning in that faculty. The educational developers report to the head of the academic faculty, but they also meet with the professional coordinator in the T&L unit. While they are based in different faculties, the educational developers and the professional coordinator constitute a technology enhanced learning (TEL) unit, albeit one that is dispersed across the HEIs discipline-based faculties.

### 4.3.1. Description of HEI A's BLAS

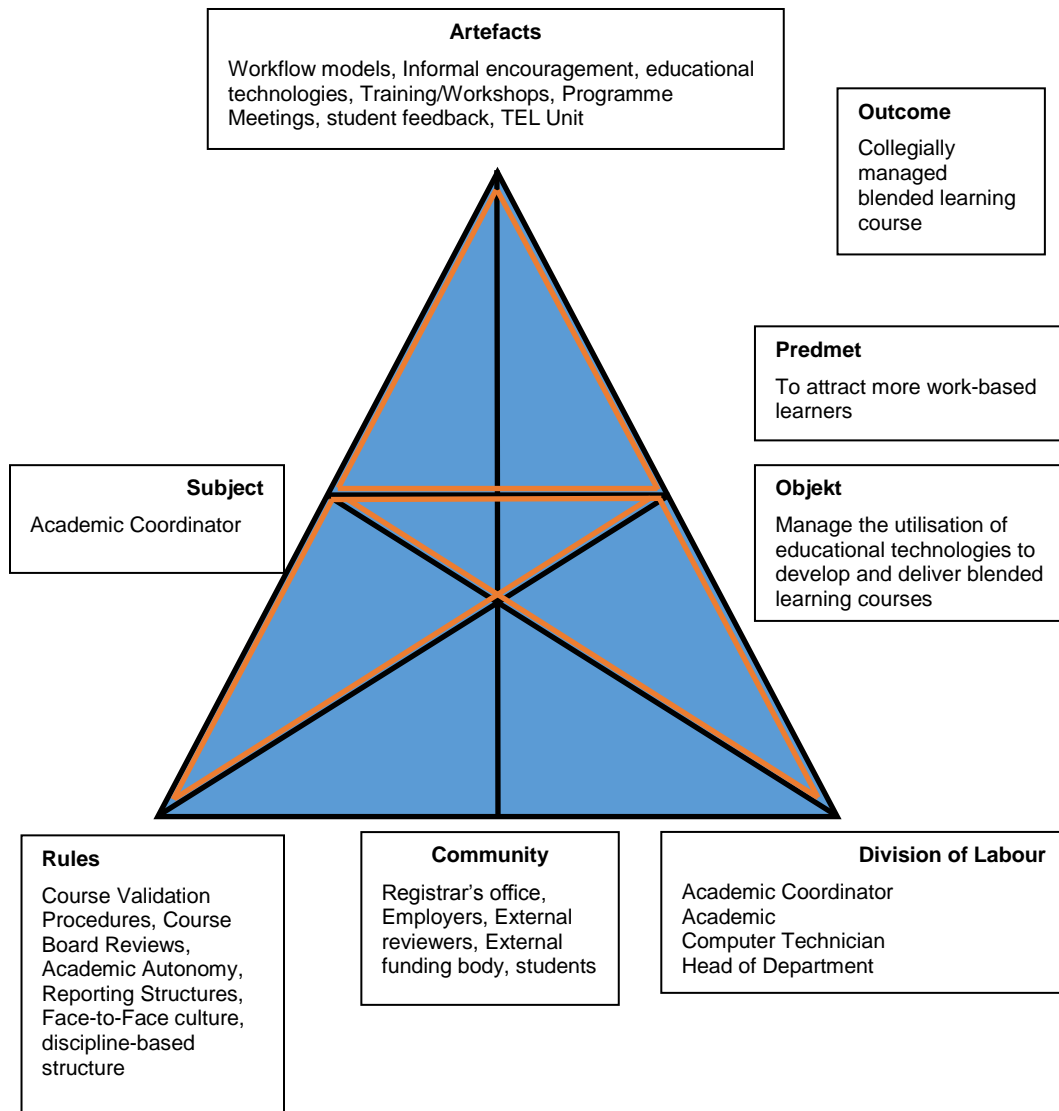


Fig 4.1 BLAS for HEI A

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#### 4.3.1.1 **Subject: The academic co-ordinator**

With HEI A, the subject—the person or persons from whose perspective the BLAS is being viewed—is the academic course coordinator.

“[the department] appointed...a head of section to look after part time programmes, so [s]he now coordinates, if [the department] has a plan for part time a programme and in fact with all the part-time programmes that we offer now have a blended or online element to them” Participant A1.

“My role within the development of the program itself from conception to validation...From an operational point of view I am program director of the Blended Learning program.... I manage the online stuff and then I actually teach on the program as well as the administration aspect of things. The only thing I don't do is, I help with the promotional aspect of things, but there is a person who looks after the [student] application process” A4.

#### 4.3.1.2 **The object-ive: Managing the utilisation of educational technologies to attract more work-based students**

HEI A's compact with the HEA states that developing blended learning is aimed at fulfilling its obligation to promote lifelong learning. The primary aim of developing blended learning courses according to the HEI A's policy on educational technology, is to enhance student-centred learning. However, in response to the question, “Why is HEI A developing and delivering blended learning courses?”, participants reported that it was in response to the market's need for more blended learning.

“Meeting the needs of people who are engaged in lifelong learning on an on-going basis... Blended really is the only



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way forward like that because people are not going to be able to be released to come in to us for a day a week or for a term or anything like that” A3.

“a larger amount of the learning is happening online so if we do not access that market we will lose it” A2.

“[if] you don’t develop blending learning programs you are going to lose potential business” A4.

These three motives—responding to market needs, promoting lifelong learning and enhance student-centred learning—illustrates the multiple rationales behind blended learning initiatives that emerged from the literature review. With these three contrasting rationales identified, the objective of HEIA’s ASM is defined as to manage the utilisation of educational technologies to develop and deliver blended learning courses (object) so as to attract more work-based students (predmet). It should be noted that this objective is not a choice for the subject. Both the HEI blended learning strategy and the demands of the market stipulate the use of educational technology and the development of blended learning courses as a condition, not as a choice, which means the subject must utilise educational technology in a blended format.

#### **4.3.1.3 Artefacts: The techniques of the TEL unit**

In HEI A, the main artefacts that are mediating the management of the development and delivery of a blended learning course are the techniques employed by the members of the TEL unit made up of the professional coordinator and the educational developers. The tasks of the TEL unit come between the academic coordinator and the objective to influence and guide the management of the course.

“Ultimately, [the academics] had a schedule laid out with lots of different technologies that they could use week by week

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but I suppose then [the TEL Unit] kind of guided them back and said a small number of tools used well and build it up gradually” A2.

“[the educational developer] had met with the course coordinator to go through what the plan was for the course....and the original validation document was comprehensive and it dealt with all aspects of how students were communicating and all lots of bells and whistles in terms of different possibilities of what they can do, but when [the professional coordinator and the educational developer] pared it down we realised a lot of what they are taught with could be done in [the LMS] to minimise... and I think it was the right decision” A2.

The decision to use the LMS as the basis for blended learning courses, which was a mediating influence of the TEL unit, defined the limits of the course and adds a level of consistency.

“Most synchronous and asynchronous we use [the LMS] so all the prep work goes up on [the LMS], all the assessment, everything is online. All the assessment is completed online” A4.

“There is a very high percentage using [the LMS], so a lot of people are comfortable with the basics of it, so you actually have a fairly solid foundation to build on when you suggest using some of the other tools” A2.

The use of workflow models to help manage the work involved in developing the courses, and the use of course models to structure the course were also introduced by the TEL unit.

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“There is you know if a group in Department X now wants to set up a Blended program and there is no history of doing it, we can also send them to Department Y who have successfully done them and there are models that people can adapt to their own context” A4.

“they have a model now that they are happy with and they sort of use that as the basis for, so you would see most of their programmes would have the same sort of structure” A1.

The TEL unit influenced and guided the relationship between the subject and the object-ive through the head of school.

“The [educational developer] meet with [the professional coordinator] and the head of school three or four times a year...and it would be through those meetings that we would be identifying what would be tied to what our strategy is or learning strategy or issues that needed to be addressed” A2.

Training sessions and workshops with academic staff are also used by the TEL unit to mediate the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses.

“we would be trying to encourage approaches [the professional coordinator is] doing the technology and the blended but when it comes to assessment or feedback [the TEL unit] would be trying to encourage them at programme or stage level discussions and encouraging departments to do it” A2.

“[the TEL unit would] be very active in providing sessions for staff to ensure that you know we are kept updated and that

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we can incorporate different types of assessments in blended learning programs” A4.

“if there is any training needed, and that is kind of [professional coordinator’s] role... who would come back and help them and guide them if they so think they need to change somehow or introduce more tools” A2.

As a higher psychological artefact, the mediating influence of the TEL unit is internalised by the academic coordinator and the academic staff, to the point where reliance on this external mediator lessens over time.

“[the professional coordinator] who works in the [TEL unit] who would have been involved with blended learning programs in other places so we would have sought advice from him from the very outset” A4.

“we have had teams who have developed quite a lot of blended programs very successfully so they have a template that really works for the kind of thing they are doing so yes, [the TEL unit] are always involved in some way but it is less now than what it was a few years ago” A1.

With the BLAS in HEI A, and from the perspective of the subject, the academic coordinator, the members of the TEL unit are a mediating artefact, who affect the relationship between the subject and the object-ive through meetings, training and advice, but whose influence wanes over time as their mediating effect is internalised by the academic coordinator. It should also be noted that the academic coordinator does not have to avail of these artefacts.

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“You see sometime the [professional coordinator] has quite a big role to play and sometimes not. It does very much depend on the [academics] themselves, the team” A3.

“The head of school, who is recently appointed, asked would [the professional coordinator] be involved. But if a school does not want [the professional coordinator] involved that is fine” A1.

#### **4.3.1.4 Division of labour: Minimal horizontal delegation**

In HEI A, the lion’s share of the core tasks in developing and delivering a course are carried out by the academic coordinator. The role appears to cover liaising with industry through to programme curriculum design and getting the course approved,

“[the academic coordinator’s] role within the development of the program itself from conception to validation within the HEA and the HEI itself and then involved with the validation process with [industry professional organisation]” A4.

day-to-day administration,

“[academic coordinator] who would do day-to-day academic management” A3.

“speakers coming in to deliver a session they would send their PowerPoint presentation to [the academic coordinator, who would] post it up on the [LMS] prior to that class. There is a lot of administration with it” A4.

planning the training for academic staff with the professional coordinator,

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“to do training that they needed and [the professional coordinator] had met with the course coordinator to go through what the plan was for the course” A2.

managing the online content and responding to student queries during delivery.

“The managing of the online stuff then the [academic coordinator] does that” A4.

“the [academic coordinator] that would be the person that oversees students’ queries” A2.

In taking sole responsibility for a number of the tasks, managing the BLAS is largely a case of self-management for the academic coordinator. However, this concentration of tasks does put a lot of pressure on the academic coordinator.

“That is all time consuming and that is another big thing for development of a program, you know at the time I didn’t think about that....If you sat back and you thought about all the time that it took to develop it to get everything up online you would probably say, well I’m not going to do that again. If you sat down and thought about the time you might cringe” A4.

The computer technician ensures that the educational technology, including the LMS, functions correctly. The computer technicians may also be involved in uploading content to the LMS.

“There was one element which I didn't mention, we have a [computer technician] who is over [the LMS and eportfolio], so any requests for those go over to the [computer technicians], so they do manage that, so there is somebody

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dedicated to that area, probably doing other things as well”

A2.

“so (s)he does all the videos for me and (s)he would put them up on [the LMS] and transfer them across you know annually” A4.

There is a horizontal division of labour relationship between the academic coordinator and the computer technician, in that the technician has a separate set of skills that the academic coordinator can avail of.

“[computer technician] is fantastic because my level of knowledge, especially with you know putting up videos and everything while it would be limited I can do the rest of the things but (s)he is there if there is any problems, (s)he is just at the end of a phone, so [academics] definitely couldn’t have functioned without the [computer technician]” A4.

Academics are tasked with preparing content and defining the assessment strategy for their modules and with making the final decisions on the technologies to be used in development and delivery.

“I guess that the flip side is that [academics] know how much content has to be delivered and [academics] know what a module is and kind of have an understanding and the module descriptors specifies what needs to be got across” A2.

The division of labour relationship between the academic coordinator and the academics is horizontal, in that the academics have a subject matter expertise that is drawn upon. The relationship is not vertical in that the academic coordinator does not have power or authority over fellow academics.

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#### 4.3.1.5 Community: Narrow and largely internal

The community that is effected by the blended learning course can impact indirectly on the management of the development and delivery of the course. The community for this HEI is comprised of the registrar's office, the head of discipline, the external funders and partnering industry representatives and the students through formal feedback and representation on the course board.

“the program board (the membership would be the representative of students on the program, those [academics] teaching on the program, the head of department,) would have an important role to play in the oversight and quality assurance of the program as well” A3.

“a request came from [a government agency] to develop programs...we went to curriculum planning with the [industry] partners they had said that the big thing from their end was time and that the staff will not be released on a weekly basis, so is there a way that a course can be developed to facilitate...the demands that the staff can't be released on a weekly basis. So that is where it came from” A4.

“external examiner, development in the field, information from things like programmatic review, approach from employers... feedback from engagement with employers, you know all that sort of thing” A3.

“But part of the programmatic review [academics] are going to be involving the students and carrying out focus groups with students that have done the course to see how best [academics] can improve it” A4.



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“where the head of school and the head of department were behind it they thought they have this programme lets try and blend it and then they put the systems in motion the [educational technologist], the contact with [professional coordinator], talked to the team got them on board...that doesn't mean that you couldn't have a team that would themselves say well let's look at going blended here, or we think we are ready to go blended and then go the other way, there is no reason why bottom up couldn't happen” A1.

HEI A has a recent strategy document for educational technology, and its Assessment and Learning Policy lists the use of flexible and blended learning approaches as part of the implementation guidelines to promote deeper learning. However, participants did not discuss an involvement in blended learning from the highest levels of the HEI. One participant lamented the lack of direction and leadership, while another was happy to see blended learning being allowed to develop without high-level interference.

#### **4.3.1.6 Rules: Regular rules and irregular issues**

HEi A's course approval process highlights taking into consideration the specific needs of flexible and different modes of delivery.

“so it [blended learning] is being thought about in a way in that you are not expected to think about if you were just validating your regular programme. The fact that we are putting it into the validation means that it is being thought about in advance” A2.

The policy and procedures on course approval outlines the importance of fitting in with HEI A's strategic plan, industry and student needs, existing courses and external political, economic and social circumstances. The same document states that course proposals are required to have, among other considerations, an assessment strategy, defined learning outcomes, a

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rationale for the course based on demand and a teaching strategy, for which proposers are encouraged to consult with the Teaching and Learning Unit, within which sits the TEL unit.

However, participants suggested there was no need for rules and regulations around blended learning.

“You know if your policies and procedures are focused on promoting good quality learning and teaching and you know promoting transparency and just high-quality activity generally then what was good for traditional work would be good for Blended learning and vice-versa” A2.

“That is absolutely no different to any other program, there is nothing special for a Blended program” A3.

“No. I don’t think there would be any different governance that are involved with Blended learning programs” A4.

So, while academics are encouraged by the official documentation to consult with the TEL staff when considering blended learning, participants stressed the lack of difference between blended and non-blended programmes. Therefore, the policy and procedures on course approval do not stipulate specific rules and regulations for blended learning courses and participants report that no such rules are required. However, , issues were also highlighted by participants that may suggest a need for new or different rules and regulations, for example around time and workload allocations for academics,

“You know it is so easy if you are writing a [course] and you have somebody in a classroom three hours a week with a group or whatever it might, but you know I suppose nationally

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there hasn't really been any progress on taking forward how do we measure online delivery work and that is a problem"  
A2.

"I don't think the managers realise the amount of time because managers in their mind are so used to timetabling somebody for 5/6/7/8 hours a week or 18 hours a week...and then they will say you may not be doing anything with the students that week, so you are not getting any time" A4.

"Anyone who has tried to move more online in their face-to-face modules would say it is quite a lot of work in online and you're at it all hours and you are drawn back to your [LMS] module so many times that you do invest a lot of hours a lot more than face-to-face and it probably takes more planning than face-to-face" A2.

how learning is defined in terms of contact hours between students and academics and independent learning,

"a program which traditionally might have had 50 hours contact over the course of a semester and now it has 15, what happens to those hours? How are they counted if the students are doing activities online, somebody maybe has to maybe be there to monitor a discussion group and prepare quizzes, or whatever it might be" A3.

and how standards for teaching and learning are monitored and maintained.

"so there was definitely no consistency across that and that's I think where the Q&A kind of falls at the moment and

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probably because we are so used to delivering in our chalk and talk modality” A2.

“The panels come in for validation. Some panels will grill the blended and be really interested in how it works and some say nothing about it and that maybe because they are happy with it or maybe because they are unsure about it and not comfortable with it” A1.

The reporting of these rule-based issues suggests that maybe a temporary change in rules is required to allow for a transition to blended learning.

“Ultimately, the plan would be to put in procedures to deal with a programmes more specifically. The only thing is over time I actually think there shouldn’t be a need for the procedures, there is no special procedures for face-to-face programs so why should there be special procedures for blended” A2.

“The culture within the higher education arena is changing. I think the culture fifteen years ago it was all class to class full time, even part time, they were all classes for full days or whatever. The mind set and culture is changing that even full time programs there is a certain amount of blendedness” A4.

The rules element of the ASM also covers more implicit rules like organisational culture. In terms of cultural norms, academic autonomy is paramount in HEI A, as are the existing discipline-based structures and processes.

“the [academic] ultimately has the responsibility because...they have to feel that they are appropriate for what

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they want to do with their students, they will only get the best out of them if they are happy with them, so ultimately they have to make the choice and then the level of tools that they use and the number of tools that they use, that depends on them” A2.

“Management don’t want to talk about it, they just say we are going to have a blended learning course and the lecturers that are on it have to do whatever has to be done to deliver it, so for people to be interested in getting involved, it has to be a bit more explicit” A2.

In HEI A, the computer technicians and the educational developers are discipline based, with the educational developer reporting to the head of discipline. Similarly, HEI A’s commitments and targets relating to educational technology and blended learning made in its 2014 Compact with the HEA were defined according to discipline.

Despite the references to blended and flexible learning in official documentation, participants tended to discuss the development and delivery of blended learning courses in a face-to-face culture.

“to come back to HR it’s like if they tick the box, send the lecturer in there for a number of hours and if they can’t tick the box and if the lecturer has not been responding to.. I guess there are ways but if that is where you want to go, I don’t know” A2.

“There is a perception that you say my class is online that you are not working the same as you would be face-to-face and there is a mind-set there that needs to shift a bit” A2.

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While there are aspects of the rules and regulation that suggest a different approach is required when developing and delivering blended learning, participants appear to want to maintain existing procedures. However, there is also a contradiction in that participants are also raising issues with developing and delivering blended learning courses that requires rule changes, especially around hour allocations and timetabling.

#### **4.3.1.7 The Outcome: Collegially managed blended learning course**

Looking back at the management typology for blended learning courses and answering the questions in Table 2.5:

**Rationale:** The rationale behind blended learning courses in HEI A would appear to be to satisfy a business goal; not losing out in the market for work-based learners.

“a larger amount of the learning is happening online so if we do not access that market we will lose it” A2.

**Driver:** Blended learning is discussed in HEI A’s strategy and official documentation, however, the driver behind the desire to develop blended learning courses is best described as bottom-up, whereby blended learning development is required or expected but not driven from above, rather it is driven from below to meet a top-down expectation.

“a request came from [a government agency] to develop programs...we went to curriculum planning with the [industry] partners...So that is where it came from” A4.

**Organisation:** The clearly delimited discipline structures indicate a decentralised approach, with the professional staff deferring to the academics and never taking on anything more collaborative than a supportive role. In HEI A, the TEL unit’s position in the artefact element, rather than in the division of labour, indicates that the disruption of educational technology is

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temporary and that the implications of educational technology will ultimately be internalised without any long-term structural changes.

“In the development of them would be the academic staff within the college and the programs that we have we involve (industry experts)” A4

**Leader:** Development and delivery is clearly led by the academic coordinator, to whom is assigned the majority of tasks and decision making authority.

If you sat back and you thought about all the time that it took to develop it to get everything up online you would probably say, well I’m not going to do that again” A4.

**Staff dynamic:** There is no sense of collaboration in HEI A, rather a number of people working largely independently of each other. The academics appear to prepare content and teach the course, within the scope of the course descriptor, and if they feel they need any support they can choose to request it or not.

“You see sometime the (professional coordinator) has quite a big role to play and sometimes not. It does very much depend on the lecturers themselves, the team” A3.

**Development process:** While there are systematic elements discussed, such as models and use of the LMS, development appears more iterative than systematic, with the models and work practices emerging from early efforts at blended learning development and subject to change by the academic.

The **outcome** of HEI A’s BLAS is a collegially managed blended learning course, with rationale being the only attribute that differs from the collegial model depicted in Table 2.7.

#### 4.3.2. Contradictions

The search for contradictions in HEI A’s BLAS starts with reports of critical conflicts and double binds in the interview transcripts, which offer an indication

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of primary and secondary contradictions respectively. How HEI A's BLAS exists as a response to the primary and secondary contradictions will illustrate examples of tertiary and quaternary contradictions.

#### **4.3.1.8 Critical Conflicts: Work overload and lack of skill**

There were two critical conflicts identified from the interviews of participants of HEI A. The first focusses on the inability of academics to carry out the necessary work in the time allocated.

"It is to do with the contract and how work load is estimated for online delivery is the problem and it does need to be resolved. You know it is so easy if you are writing a program and you have somebody in a classroom three hours a week with a group or whatever it might be" A3.

"lecturers' time it's not what constitutes time in terms of online it is just assumed that one transitions into another, so there is no real clarity around that" A2.

"There is a perception that you say my class is online that you are not working the same as you would be face-to-face and there is a mind-set there that needs to shift a bit. To me that is the biggest problems that mind-set that face-to-face that your hours are countable in your face-to-face where online might often take more time than face-to-face bit of suspicion or uncertainty about the amount work" A1.

"To put it in the at its basic what the lecturer will be doing time on task but the module descriptor says contact hours and HR say you have got 20 hours a week so that will be a breakdown, how do those three things connect, so that will be one breakdown in terms of that" A2.



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The second critical conflict focussed on the lack of skill by academics to develop and deliver blended learning courses on their own.

“Now the IT technician is fantastic because my level of knowledge, especially with you know putting up videos and everything while it would be limited I can do the rest of the things but he is there if there is any problems, he is just at the end of a phone, so I definitely couldn’t have functioned without the IT technician” A4.

“Lecturers are lecturers and not necessarily e-learning developers so that’s a possible breakdown it’s not clear at the moment that would be another one” A2.

These critical conflicts are manifestations of a primary contradiction centred on the use and exchange value of the academic. With the advent of blended learning courses, the exchange value of the academic remains unchanged, in that the academic’s value in the marketplace is the same, however, the use value of the academic has diminished. With face-to-face course development and delivery the academic was solely responsible for almost every task, however, with blended learning additional skills and additional development time are required. Therefore, when they adopt blended learning, HEIs are not getting the same use value for the same exchange value as they do with when an academic is working on a fully face-to-face course.

“Management don’t want to talk about it, they just say we are going to have a blended learning course and the lecturers that are on it have to do whatever has to be done to deliver it” A2.

The response by A2 is not strictly true. In order to address this primary contradiction, HEI has taken a number of steps. Management allocated hours to a professional coordinator and to educational developers to support

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the development of blended learning courses. The professional coordinator and educational developer offer training and workshops and advice. Management has also paid for a limited number of educational technologies, such as an LMS, although it was noted that the educational technologies budget was quite small.

“the [educational technologies] that you would promote would tend to be free or very cheap and are easy for people to use that is the key thing” A1.

“The [TEL unit] budgets would not allow us to buy licenses, so we would buy some equipment. The National Forum projects have allowed us to buy equipment, but if it were not for them it would be a lot more difficult to be honest” A1.

The response of the HEI, to bring in new technology and new roles then has a knock-on effect.

HEI A's means of addressing the imbalance between the exchange and use value of the academic has been to adopt a collegial approach to managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses, whereby the focus is on re-building the use value of the academic through building capacity.

“There has been a lot of capacity built, a lot of training, a lot of staff have completed quite a bit of training or staff development. I know that order choice keeps changing, and I suppose at an institutional level support, capacity building would be the big thing and we have done quite a bit of work around that and that has helped enormously” A3.

This collegial approach has brought its own group of double binds that indicate secondary contradictions, however.

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#### 4.3.1.9 Double Binds: Academic freedom, collaboration and the right to say no

The first double bind emerges from the idea that developing blended learning requires additional time for the academic because of the additional workload and the need to be advised and trained by professional staff.

“It is difficult to do, you take programme teams or even if you go to a smaller level a stage team five lecturers between five modules, it can be quite hard for them to get time to be discussing, but that is a big problem in all the colleges. Again, with the limited time that you have. Cos that is the one thing that comes through in all the colleges time is the big issue” A1.

“The teaching areas are very very high, other responsibility are very high so the time available is quite low and even I know it is the same in other places too even to get meetings together is becoming increasingly difficult because it is very hard to find people free at the same time so you can spend hours simply trying to set up a meeting without ever actually achieving anything” A3.

“It’s actually really difficult [to organise training] and lots of places have that problem because the timetables are chock a block. I found that by doing some screencasts and making those available that’s another way to get at it. So, and people like them, we done a survey where we’ve asked people do you want the face to face workshops or something else and again they like the face-to-face but sometimes the other is more practical” A1.

“That is all time consuming and that is another big thing for development of a program, you know at the time I didn’t think about that. You know it is extra time on the lecturer that is

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going to be involved in it or the coordinator that is going to be managing the online aspect of things, to know how to do it online, and to know how to do them right and that you are” A4.

This double bind is a manifestation of a secondary contradiction between rules and division of labour. The onset of blended learning and its dependence on the use of educational technologies can mean more work and more meetings and more seeking advice from professional staff. However, there is no more time allocated by management because the exchange value of the academic remains constant, and academics are expected to work in the same amount of time and for the same financial recompense.

The second double bind that was identified relates to the need for academics to upskill or alter their ways of teaching in order to accommodate blended learning against the cultural norm of academic freedom, which means that academic staff do not have to engage with blended learning unless they chose to.

“but again it does depend on whether program team is always recognised and needn’t take it up” A3.

“they will only get the best out of them if they are happy with them, so ultimately they have to be make the choice and then the level of [educational technologies] that they use and the number of [educational technologies] that they use, that depends on them” A1.

“The idea of the training and so on for teachers who may not be that familiar with [LMS] or the activities that they can use, I would be involved in that and make suggestions to them and point to good practice and so on but ultimately they make the decisions as to what happens and I support them and guide them if they have any questions, but again just like any

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module, a face-to-face module, the teacher ultimately has the responsibility” A1.

This double bind between the need for training and the academic opt out clause is a manifestation of the secondary contradiction between rule of academic freedom and the artefacts of training and upskilling required to manage the development and delivery of the blended learning course.

A third double bind identified is between the need for oversight and quality control with blended learning against the cultural norm of academic freedom

“I don’t think there is a mechanism there really to keep track of that and to make sure that it is being delivered in a consistent way at the moment. You have academic freedom so to speak, so there is no-one to say that, so who says that that lecturer has delivered the number of hours that is required of them within a blended learning mode, how do we assess that? So I don’t think they are being monitored closely enough it is being seen as just another course that will run fine, so I don’t think the oversight is heavy enough... the module descriptors specifies what needs to be got across so in terms of that quality assurance that's there the content that has to be delivered the assessments are all kind of detailed and something that we have been doing, which I don't think we have to, but it’s been a part of the programme validation that is if it is blended identified as blended and the interactions that have to go into that” A2.

The double bind here is that in order for blended learning to deliver a valid learning experience certain approaches and interactions need to be adopted by the academic, which are built into the documentation even though it does not have to be. However, given the nature of academic freedom, it is not possible to verify whether or not those approaches are being adhered to. A

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secondary contradiction between the rules, academic freedom, and the artefacts is manifest in a double bind in HEI A's BLAS.

#### **4.3.1.10 Tertiary Contradictions: Maintaining the status quo**

HEI A's collegially managed approach to developing and delivering blended learning courses to compensate for the change in exchange and use value of the academic led to three secondary contradictions being identified between the rules and the artefacts on HEI A's BLAS. In adopting a collegially managed approach, HEI A's efforts to compensate for the secondary contradictions is to maintain and support the cultural norm of academic freedom, while offering voluntary upskilling through building digital capacity and encouraging staff to avail of the offer. It would appear that to adopt a collegially managed approach to the BLAS is to maintain the status quo.

A tertiary contradiction occurs between the "object/motive of the dominant form of the central activity and the object/motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity" (Engestrom, 2015, p. 71). The objekt of HEI A's BLAS is the utilisation of educational technology to develop and deliver blended learning courses. The objekt of an activity system to develop face-to-face courses does not stipulate the use of educational technologies, which would suggest that the objekt has changed. Tertiary contradictions emerge "as people attempt to use a new model while many established practices retain currency" (Bligh & Flood, 2015). The collegially managed approach to blended learning adopted by HEI A would suggest that the new model to achieve a new objekt is retaining many established practices. This tertiary contradiction manifests itself in the additional workload on the academic and the academic coordinator.

"No I think when you are going to deliver a Blended learning program you...have to be motivated to take on board and you take a practice with a new teaching method. For an [academic] and for the student it is quite time consuming and I don't think the managers realise the amount of time because managers in

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their mind are so used to time tabling somebody for 5/6/7/8 hours a week or 18 hours a week” A4.

By adopting the same practices, rules and division of labour that occurs in the development and delivery of a face-to-face course, the academic and academic coordinator appear to be taking on additional work in an unsustainable manner.

“If you sat back and you thought about all the time that it took to develop it to get everything up online you would probably say, well I’m not going to do that again” A4.

Participants’ comments about looking to outside agencies, such as the National Forum, reinforces the idea that the status quo is being maintained in HEI A, despite the advent of blended learning, and that any change has to come from the outside.

“It is to do with the contract and how work load is estimated for online delivery is the problem and it does need to be resolved...but you know I suppose nationally there hasn’t really been any progress on taking forward how do we measure online delivery work and that is a problem” A3.

#### **4.3.1.11 Quaternary Contradiction: Not acknowledging a change in format**

As stated in this chapter’s introduction, quaternary contradictions are those identified between the BLAS and a neighbouring activity, the outcome of which feeds into an element of the BLAS. The neighbouring activity selected is the course approval process as defined by HEI A’s *Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes*, the outcome of which feeds into the rules element of the BLAS for HEI A.

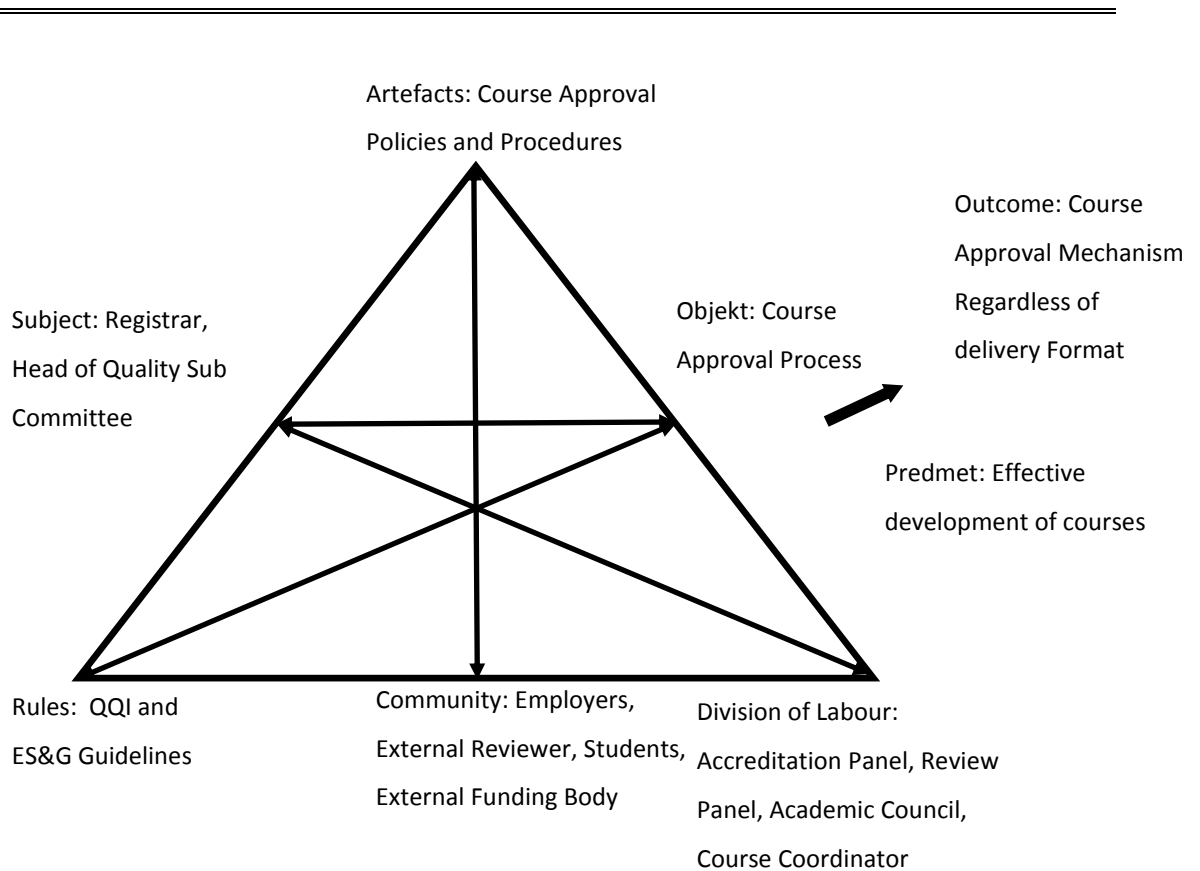


Fig 4.2 ASM of HEI A's Course Approval Process

The object-ive of this neighbouring activity is identified as a course approval process (objekt) to allow for the efficient and effective development of courses that satisfy HEI and student needs (predmet). According to HEI A's *Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes*, the policies and procedures for approving a course are based on Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) *Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training and Standards* (QQI, 2017) and the *Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)* (ES&G, 2015). The QQI document does not directly address blended learning courses, however, QQI currently has *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning* in draft format for consultation (QQI, 2017). The ESG document applies "to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery" (ES&G, 2015 p. 7), without mentioning blended learning. The subjects of this neighbouring activity, the registrar and head of the academic sub-committee on quality, would not necessarily have any expertise in utilising educational technologies. HEI A's *Policy on the Design and Approval of*



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*Programmes*, outlines the need to specify the mode of delivery and advises, but does not stipulate, that the T&L unit in HEI A is consulted regarding teaching strategy, learning and assessment strategies. The policy and procedures require that for a course to be approved it needs to satisfy a number of criteria that have to do with market demand, HEI strategy, cost, resource allocation etc. There are no specifications with regard to the course being blended, with the exception of one reference for the need for the course application to show that it has consulted with best practice for similar programmes. The tasks in approving a course are divided between an accreditation panel, a review panel, the academic council and the academic coordinator of the course. While, there may be expertise in utilising educational technologies to develop and deliver blended learning on these panels, the procedures and policy document does not specify that there needs to be. One participant remarked on the activities of the review process:

“Some panels will grill the blended and be really interested in how it works and some say nothing about it” A1.

The community in the two neighbouring activities is essentially the same. The outcome of this neighbouring activity is a mechanism for approving courses that does not take format of delivery into consideration. However, the outcome of this activity feeds into the tools element of the BLAS, which is an activity where the objekt is defined by the mode of delivery—the utilisation of educational technologies to develop and deliver a blended learning course. This quaternary contradiction manifests itself in the conflicting message coming from participants who claim that there does not need to be new or different rules to accommodate the development and delivery of blended learning courses, but at the same time, report the need for new rules and guidance.

“I would be very concerned about setting up separate rules and policies because if your policies are good they should apply, now you might have slightly separate procedures to

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govern some things but it is so easy if you are writing a program and you have somebody in a classroom three hours a week with a group or whatever it might, but you know I suppose nationally there hasn't really been any progress on taking forward how do we measure online delivery work and that is a problem" A3

"Now I think generally there is probably a need within the sector for more guidance rather than national level policies around things like use of materials and I think there is a lot of confusion sometimes about copyright and so on" A3.

The collegially managed approach to the development and delivery of blended learning courses in HEI A has meant that there has been no change to the activity that generates the rules for the BLAS. The object for the BLAS however, specifies a change in mode of delivery for which there appears to be no accommodation for in the rules, or the perception is that the rules are sufficiently general to accommodate a change in mode of delivery. Nonetheless, the change in mode of delivery does appear to have sufficient impact to make the neighbouring activity that generates the rules for the BLAS somewhat insufficient.

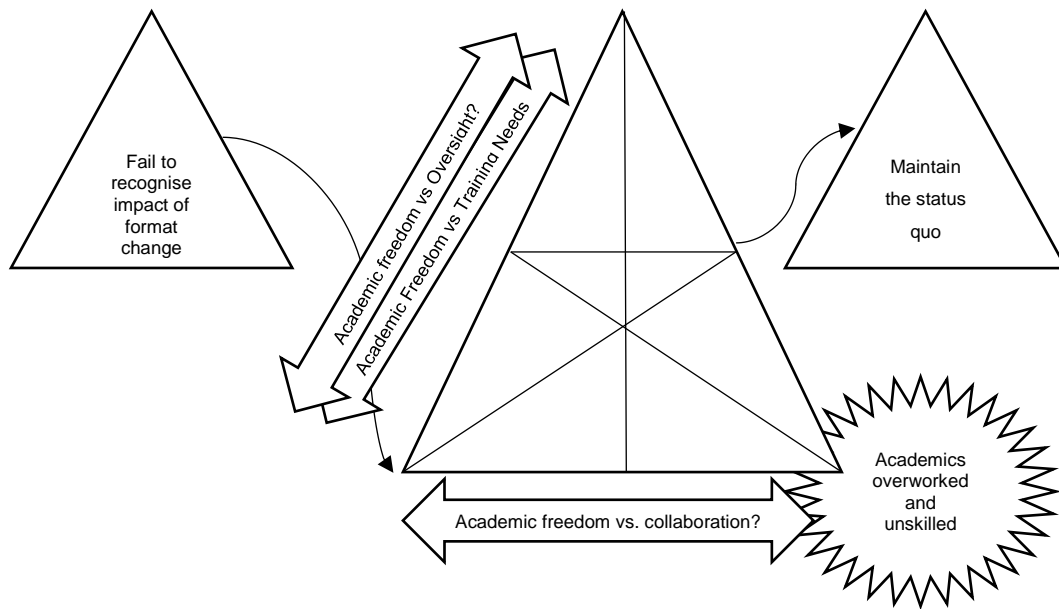


Fig. 4.3 Summary of Contradictions in HEI A's BLAS

This quaternary contradiction is illustrated in figure 4.3 as feeding into the rules element of the ASM for HEI A. Similarly figure 4.3 shows the primary contradiction occurring within the division of labour element and the two identified secondary contradictions between the rules and artefact elements and the one secondary contradiction between the rules and division of labour element. Finally, figure 4.3 shows the tertiary contradiction in maintaining established practices while trying to achieve the new object of utilising digital technology to provide blended learning courses.

## 4.4. HEI B

HEI B's strategy commits the HEI to developing more blended learning courses and developing its digital technology infrastructure to facilitate blended learning. It sets a target of having 80% of its programmes available to work-based learners by 2020. Work-based blended learning courses in HEI B are delivered by discipline based academic staff but organised by a centralised lifelong learning department. HEI B has a T&L unit that supports the use of educational technology in teaching and learning through courses and training, and it administers HEI B's LMS. The T&L unit employs educational technologists, and there are educational technologists based in the lifelong learning department as well.

### 4.4.1. Description of HEI B's BLAS

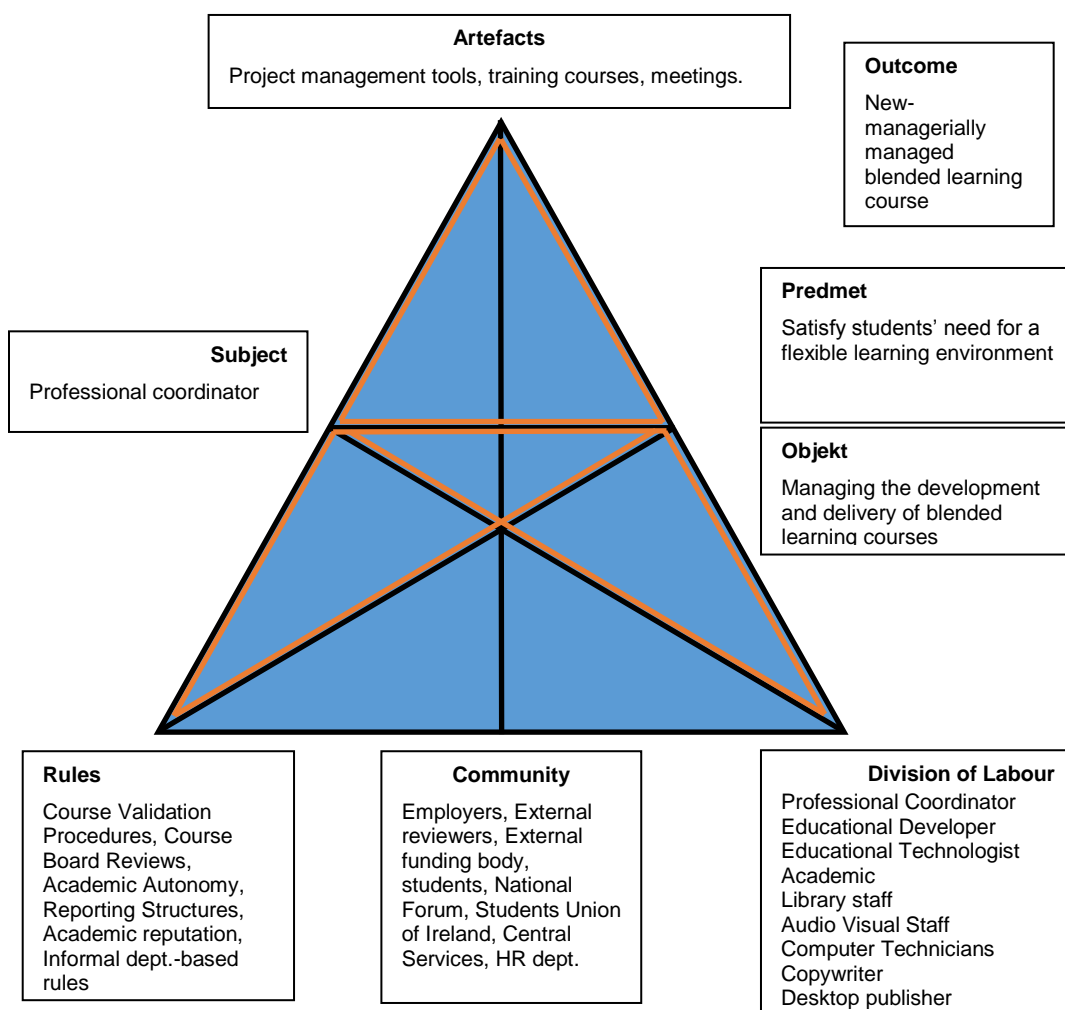


Fig. 4.4 BLAS for HEI B

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#### **4.4.1.1 Subject: The professional coordinator**

With HEI B, the subject was clearly defined by all participants as the professional coordinator, who is based in the lifelong learning department.

“[professional coordinators] are the ones that are putting it together and working [academics] to develop content as well, to develop the curriculum” B1.

“the [professional coordinator] does oversee the overall process so I think really he or she is the person there who would keep an eye that everything is being adhered to” B4.

#### **4.4.1.2 Object-ive: Managing blended learning courses to satisfy students’ needs for a flexible learning environment**

Unlike HEI A, where the teaching and learning strategy drew a direct line between utilising educational technologies, blended learning and enhancing student-centred learning, HEI B’s teaching and learning strategy refers only to the growth of blended and flexible learning that needs to be accommodated. Participants reported a number of objectives (predmet).

“[it] is meeting a student numbers thing, meeting a budgetary requirement or just raising a brand awareness of raising the profile of the [HEI’s] suite of programs in this area so there is always multiple reasons why we do any project” B4.

However, the most common response was that the purpose of blended learning courses was to respond to student learning requirements.

“Access for students I think to the materials. They want to be able to access their materials online” B1.

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“I think that blended learning approaches also caters for the fact that a lot of students just want to be strategic and want to just get through. B2.

There is also the idea that responding to students’ needs makes good business sense.

“providing programs that meet the needs of [students] and if the need is in a flexible more we will put in that way, or if it is in an online mode that is the way we go. So it is just really part of the business model” B4.

“the HEI’s strategy...is to increase flexible delivery so when we are developing a course it would be stating that it is in line with the HEI’s strategy. We are trying to increase the percentage of flexible programs that are on offer to meet with our regions needs or whichever” B3.

“It’s the enhancement of the student experience, because that relates to other institutional concerns such as retention and completion” B2.

“there isn’t sufficient demand to maintain the program face to face so what do we do about that? Do we let the program the program go or do we diversify and then if we diversify what is the best way to do that” B3

The object-ive for the BLAS for HEI B is, therefore, defined as managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses (objekt) to satisfy students’ need for a flexible learning environment (predmet). The problem for the subject then becomes how to manage the BLAS in order to achieve a flexible learning environment for the students.

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#### 4.4.1.3 Artefacts: Project management instruments

For HEI B, the artefacts mediating the processes of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses tend to be tools associated with project management, such as development schedules,

“we do a development schedule and that development schedule sets out when [the academic’s] deadlines are for units and it shows that first they have to write the overview” B3.

templates,

“come up with a common [LMS] format for all the programs to use” B1

“every module that forms part of a program suite is fitting into an overarching design approach” B4.

training needs analysis,

“we sit down and go through what are [the academic’s] training needs, then we would identify do they need training with podcasting, with screen casting, with videos, with discussion boards or with blogs and if they do we sign them up for training that will take place before the first semester” B3.

workflows

“By tidying things up and managing workflow and workloads better it means we are working in a more enhanced way in that we are working in a way that we are project orientated rather than reactive” B2.

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and best practice.

“letting [academics] know what the best practice is. Not how they should be doing it but here’s what best practice is. Here’s what the literature says we should be doing. And some people didn’t change the way they were doing it. You know we are trying to slowly but surely move [academics] along in that way” B1.

Teaching courses and training and workshop sessions are used as vehicles to encourage blended learning development and delivery processes.

“there are teaching programmes they are also designed to be exemplars of the kind of methodologies that the [TEL Unit] are promoting” B2.

These artefacts—project management tools—allow the subject to exert greater control of how the development and delivery of blended learning courses is managed. They constrict the academic to timelines and specific ways of working. They do not mediate the type of content developed for the course or academic value of the content or its delivery, but they do influence when the content is created, how it is presented and what technologies are used. As such, project management tools mediate the relationship between the subject and the object-ive.

“It is very systematic and in that way because it is systematic it is easier to manage and then because it is very much about a style adopted and a methodology” B3.



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#### 4.4.1.4 Division of Labour: Vertical, cross-department, cross-role delegation

With the division of labour, the first aspect that stands out is the number of roles involved and the cross-department nature of those roles.

“Well it is a team of people really, you have the academic disciplines who have the content and then you would have maybe the [professional coordinator] and then you would also have the input at certain stages of the project with an [educational technologist]...and then also we would have the library involved at different stages as well...we have a very close relationship with the [T&L unit] if they had extra expertise for something that they could share with us, so we would depend on them for a lot of the advice around [the LMS], certainly they manage the whole licencing with [the LMS], any new additions. They do all of that” B4.

The role of initiating the course lies with the professional coordinator. The course can originate in the disciplines, but it tends to start with the professional coordinator.

“[professional coordinator] would come up with the idea for setting up the programs so would put a proposal together...and then [professional coordinator and head of discipline] would have agreed on a management, how we would manage and develop the [course] B3.

“[professional coordinators] are the ones that come up with the curriculum and the director of the [lifelong learning department] would have something to do with it...the [professional coordinators] are the ones that are putting it together and working [academics] to develop content as well, to develop the curriculum” B1.

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The academics develop the content and devise the assessment strategy. They can look to the educational technologist for support.

“[the educational technologist’s ] role is a lot more about helping the [academics] feel comfortable in that role, because for a lot of them even though they have been using [the LMS] for a long time they haven’t specifically been teaching Blended learning courses” B1.

“[the educational technologist] has also been putting together a lot of supports for the [academics]...set up an [LMS] module as a professional development staff support and staff resources” B1.

In putting together the content and making decisions around educational technologies, professional staff in HEI B appear to have more than a technical role.

“we see everybody as involved in supporting, everybody as pedagogically people in some way, so the learning technologists are not just technologists they are essential to developing pedagogy and to think in terms of good pedagogy” B2.

“the audio visual really isn’t or increasingly is not your traditional audio visual support, they are much more engaged in learning spaces, so they are far more consultative on the design and enhancement of learning spaces” B2.

Other professionals are brought in to the activity through the division of labour. The use of other professionals can be on an outsourced basis.

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“the [instructional designer] will look at is the style of writing, just that it is written in present tense in the first person and will check for plagiarism and will check for referencing and will apply our house style” B3.

“If we don’t have somebody specifically internally and we have to get somebody outside we would have a contract with them. We would have part time [academics] that we might use for some work for particular areas if the [academic] isn’t available we might do that” B4.

“The [instructional designer]...applies the template, applies the table of content...and it is a kind of formatting style, formatting the font, the page numbers all that kind of thing” B3.

“library staff would advise on maybe journals that they could access or perhaps services that the students could avail of...or what e-books might be available so they are just providing a service, like an advisory role” B4.

Decision making on the curriculum appears to be collaborative between the professional coordinator and the academic.

“[the choice of educational technology] is more made between [professional coordinator] and the [academic] and then it would just be looking at content to say, what would work best” B3.

Although the decisions about academic content rest with the discipline.

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“it is very much so about the discipline deciding that it is appropriate, that the pedagogy used is suiting the content” B4.

“The [professional coordinator] manages the delivery and development and manages the content development but [is] not responsible for the academic content” B3.

The educational technologist and the professional coordinator ensure that the academics can deliver the course.

“So it is a lot of providing support, which is a big part of the [educational technologist’s] role. Besides just going out and doing training sessions with [academics], it gives them support at the level that they need” B1.

“if the [professional coordinator] felt like [the academics] were floundering possibly or that the students were unhappy with the way the course was being delivered [the academics] might say come in and talk...and we will see what we can do differently, because you know we have [an educational technologist] and (s)he can do stuff for you now” B1.

While also providing support for the students.

“they all wanted the technical support as well because it was something new for them. These were fourth-year students who did do Blended learning but had never done a synchronous thing...so [the educational technologist] made a handout for them” B1.

Ultimately, ensuring that a quality course is developed and delivered comes back to the professional coordinator.

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“the [project coordinator] does oversee the overall process so I think really (s)he is the person there who would keep an eye that everything is being adhered to” B4.

As such, the professional coordinator has the role of deciding if and when an academic may not be involved in the course.

“case of referring back to the [head of discipline] to say [the professional coordinators] don’t think this is the best match of the time we have available and [the professional coordinators] don’t think this [academic] would be in a position to meet the students’ learning needs” B3.

There appears to be a vertical relationship between the professional coordinator and the rest of the team. While the academic reports to the head of discipline, the professional coordinator has the power to remove the academic from the course through the head of discipline and to outsource the work to another academic, who may not be a member of the HEI. The educational technologist reports to the professional coordinator in what is again a vertical relationship. The same would also be said for expertise that is outsourced, such as instructional designers. With the library, the relationship is more horizontal in that the professional coordinator invites in the expertise of the library staff, and as such the relationship is based on needed skill rather than power.

Within the team, the division of labour relationship is more horizontal between the educational technologist and the academics. The academic invites in the additional expertise of the educational technologist to assist with the development and delivery of a module. As with HEI A, there is a sense that the educational technologist may take on the role of an artefact, whose knowledge and experience can be internalised by the academic. As such the division of labour relationship between the academic and the educational

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technologist is horizontal, in that it is based on a need for expertise rather than a response to authority.

#### **4.4.1.5 Community: Students, department, HEI and beyond**

External influences on the development and delivery of blended learning courses at HEI B included the external examiners,

“one of the questions that the external examiner raised was how do we ensure that when someone leaves with the award diploma that they have requisite level of intellectual content if a number of our modules are very practice orientated” B2.

local industry

“influences are obviously external bodies, you know on responding to what is needed so looking at the skills needs within Ireland and then how we can satisfy that and then given we are based [location in Ireland and list of local companies] here and so what training can we provide to those companies” B3.

and national bodies, such as the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFTL) and the Students’ Union of Ireland.

“The other thing that impacts on us positively is the national forum...I would also say the shift in the students union nationally toward thinking about teaching and learning and the students’ experience I think that will increasingly become a major support for what we are trying to do” B2.

“we have got a quality review and we are very consciously wanting to use that vehicle to just reflect on what we are

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doing alongside the national forum’s professional development framework, we want to use both of those to really think deep and hard about what we are doing” B2.

Internally, the central services were seen as a negative influence on the ability to develop and delivery blended learning courses, although strategic approval for blended learning does appear to help.

“so you will know yourself how HR departments respond to these things they take forever the person is almost back at work by the time you have replaced them” B2.

“HR those core central services like HR and finance the kind of the pace of response that we might need is not met by the need of the pace from some of those core services. We are not like most of the programs the systems for registration examinations doesn’t fit us...and so we are constantly coming up against the inflexibility of these central systems against the more dynamic model that we fit” B2.

“what I mentioned before about the strategic plan at the [HEI] before flexible learning was in there...but once that changed it just made the development of the curriculum for the course to then go through the approval process more easy” B3.

Despite an acknowledgement of the growing importance of blended and online learning in HEI B’s teaching and learning strategic documents—HEI B made a commitment to increase student numbers in blended and online courses in its 2014 compact with the HEA—participants did not see senior management of the HEI as having a community-like impact in the development and delivery of blended learning courses.

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“There isn’t really a [HEI] perspective. There isn’t a kind of, apart from the teaching and learning strategy which says about taking an active approach to teaching and assessment, there isn’t really a drive around blended learning” B2.

“one is a lack of awareness and understanding [at management level] of what we do” B2.

#### **4.4.1.6 Rules: Self-defined**

According to the policies and procedures of HEI B, blended learning courses are developed and delivered according to the same course approval and quality review regulations as non-blended learning courses. There is a course approval process, and then course board meetings, which are required at least twice a year. The make-up of the course board is laid out in the rules for courses delivered within a discipline and for those that cut across disciplines and faculties, but there would not be any mention of blended learning in these documents.

“The fact that it is blended doesn’t matter. It would be same as how any course would be approved” B4.

“any new program has to be approved by a program board, a discipline, and that would be say if it is going to start in September [the professional coordinator] would have to have that approved by the Board by January and then from there, once it is approved there then it would have to go to the [teaching and learning committee] they would review the learning outcomes and the effective methodology and then from there it goes to the [department] office and it is agreed, once it has gotten approval there it goes to the academic committee of the [HEI] so it is a lot of administration that it would have to go through” B3.



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The HEI-wide rules and regulations are limited in scope, with course teams and academics appearing to have considerable autonomy.

“would have to be approved by the academic oversight group for any program so it would have to go through that process, but that is just really the surface end. You know what is the content, what is the structure; it is not really looking at the detail of how the courses are designed or delivered. That kind of piece is left...there is more of the design and the pedagogy left to the ones who are closer to the content but the overarching approval of course content is by the normal group at [HEI] level for whatever discipline it links to and then we have an academic oversight group who approves all our courses” B4.

“I wouldn’t say that the rules and regulations were designed for face-to-face. I don’t think that is correct. I think the approval process was designed for an approval process. I don’t think the delivery methodology is, like the way that process works I think if your program is face to face or Blended learning you still have to go through the same set” B3.

“There is a lot of academic freedom when it comes to how you are delivering this but I would say the heads of schools and the heads of the programs are the ones making sure that it is following the rules and regulations” B1.

The freedom to develop and deliver was seen as a positive aspect.

“It is so simple sometimes. I mean it is not like any contractual agreement with someone and maybe that is the

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problem sometimes, you know you get stretched into things. Maybe it is the way it should be more structural but I think sometimes there you can get bogged down in defining what has to be done and then nothing gets done” B4.

“No there isn’t. I don’t think the approval process has any negative implications for Blended and online programs” B3.

The academic reputation of blended learning courses was also put forward as an implicit form of governance, in that those developing and delivering blended learning courses were conscious of maintaining and not damaging their academic reputation within the HEI.

“while we have that space we are also very exposed so we get people from right across the [HEI]....our reputation is at stake” B2.

Participants did discuss defining their own informal rules specific to the development and delivery of blended learning courses, however, and the potential to formalise those rules outside the confines of blended learning course development and delivery. At present, such internal rules are self-imposed.

“So I did a bit of research for the first couple of months and came up with a standardised, really pared down, you know we have there is a course information section, there is a learning material section, there is an assessment section and trying to encourage people to put things into those sections and just coming up with a nice format based on the literature that says you know” B1.

The value of rules, or protocols, was highlighted by one participant.

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“it is much more useful in terms of our relationship with the rest of the university that we have those protocols in place”

B2.

“managing workflow better through these protocols in part it means that the AV team have been able to develop their working in terms of projects and not just be responsible they have been proactive and they develop projects that they work on” B2.

“Well there isn’t a central rule book per say. We work off our [LMS] so we have a set of best practice for that, so that we have a rule book for that but we have devised...our own project guidelines and our own design guidelines” B4.

“every module that forms part of a program suite is fitting into an overarching design approach because everything has to look the same on the program and if it doesn’t then the students are going to feel a bit discommoded...we try and implement best practice guidelines and then we train [academics] who are developing the content to kind of adhere to that and then they are checked by the [educational technologist] after that, so it is more a local quality assurance process” B4.

At what level rules can be applied varies depending on the relationship of the staff to the development and delivery of the blended learning course.

“It is a mix and who we engage with really depends. We go to the [departments] first and we ask them to nominate someone. Now we have loads of problems with that...if we have a permanent member of staff within our [HEI] we can’t

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pay them above their workload. So will this be part of the departments teaching working load and if it is part of our teaching working load it is great, it is easier to work so with a few tricky things here within our institution in that way of engaging [academics] but we ask firstly that the [departments] nominate someone...because we are not [academics]" B3.

"I think, I mean when we engage anyone to do some [work] and we are paying them then we would have a contract to say what is required. So we do have contracts like that, you know an agreement of what is to be delivered" B4.

In terms of cultural norms, participants described a restrictive academic, collegial culture and discipline-based organisational structure.

"But [the academics] do tend to stay in their clusters within their program you know so the people who are chosen to work on that [course] are always huddled together and working on that [course] and then they might come to [educational technologist] with a question and they go back and so they are just getting used to [the educational technologist] being there as well" B1.

"in terms of the structures that have the same resource allocation. For example staffing, that is biased toward academic departments which means that by professional departments loose out because...the logic is...we will hire another [academic] rather than get another [educational developer] that will enhance teaching across the [HEI], so we struggle with that" B2.

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“The system isn’t flexible enough I think for change” B3.

“I mean the thing there is about courses and how they come up and where we, we have partnership for different disciplines at different levels so in some areas we might do all of the course development for them and we would have a partnership for that and then others maybe they might just need some support, it could be just administrative or it could be emotional support or whatever if it is an audience that would be suited to the group we targeted” B4.

#### **4.4.1.7 The Outcome: A new managerially managed blended learning course**

Looking back at the management typology for blended learning courses and answering the questions in Table 2.5:

**Rationale:** The rationale behind blended learning courses in HEI B would appear to be to satisfy student demand for flexible learning environment, and thereby maintain or increase student numbers.

“You know so I think they (management) have figured that out in (HEI B) and then the push for the last few years has been on making sure that we are doing this the best way we can for the students” B1.

**Driver:** The development of blended learning is highlighted as a strategic aim by HEI B, suggesting it is top-down driven. However, there did not appear to be any evidence of the top driving the development of blended learning courses other than stating it as a strategic goal. The development appears to be driven from middle management, where the courses are devised.

So over the last two years, (the professional coordinator) has set up three new courses.....would come up with the idea for setting up the programs and it would be mainly, first, if (the professional coordinator) feels we have modules within a

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program that we could make more use of them, that we could create an associated program that plugs into an another program” B3.

The lack of top-down drivers is also illustrated in the discussion of community, where the participants appeared to look more to external bodies and influences rather than internally to senior management.

“The other thing that impacts on us positively is the national forum...I would also say the shift in the students union nationally toward thinking about teaching and learning and the students’ experience” B2.

The involvement of the higher echelons of the organisation would better be described as limited facilitation, in that they are not standing in the way of blended learning development but are not necessarily encouraging it either.

**Organisation:** Despite the involvement of discipline-based academics, blended learning course development and delivery is centrally organised in HEI B.

absolutely (lifelong learning) have control over it and I think most people are quite open to take direction because they are all a bit new to some of this (blended learning) themselves B4.

**Leader:** The management of the BLAS is clearly led by the professional coordinator, who has a predominantly vertical division of labour relationship with the staff who work on the course, including the academic staff. Unlike the academic coordinator, however, the professional coordinator delegates a number of tasks to professional and academic staff and adopts a project manager’s role.

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**Staff dynamic:** There appears to be more of a collaborative staff dynamic in HEI B than in HEI A, in that staff do not appear to be working independently of each other.

“Well it is a team of people really...you have the subject matter, the instruction designer and a (professional coordinator) and then also we would have the library involved at different stages as well. So you would have different players coming in and out of the process” B4.

The professional coordinator and the academics collaborate on curriculum design and the academics and the educational technologist appear to collaborate on the use of educational technologies. Participants reporting on the pedagogical role of the audio-visual staff and the educational technologists also suggests a level of collaboration with the academics. However, there is no link between the academic and the instructional designers, who all work separately and communicate only with the professional coordinator.

**Development process:** The importance of a systematic development process was reported by a number of participants both in the artefacts used and the internally devised rules that have been developed.

“It (the development process) is very systematic and in that way because it is systematic it is easier to manage and then because it is very much about a style adopted and a methodology about it that people coming into the process are more inclined to engage because it is clearer to them what they are going to do, what they have to do, what their colleagues have done before them” B3.

Another difference with HEI A was that the artefacts used to maintain a systematic approach, models, development schedules etc. were owned by the professional coordinator and the centralised department rather than in HEI A where models were given over to the discipline to be adapted to reflect a more iterative form of development if desired.

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The **outcome** of HEI B's BLAS is largely a new managerialist managed blended learning course. The lack of a top-down driver appears to be the only aspect of the BLAS that would prevent HEI B from being placed at the end of the new managerialist side of the blended learning management spectrum. It would appear that in an effort to manage the development of a blended learning course to satisfy the perceived student need for a flexible learning environment, the professional coordinator has devised a new managerially managed BLAS.

#### 4.4.2. Contradictions

The discussion of contradictions in HEI B's BLAS starts with critical conflicts and double binds and, as with HEI A, the discussion moves on to look at HEI B's response to those contradictions highlighting examples of tertiary and quaternary contradictions.

##### 4.4.1.8 **Critical Conflicts: Insufficient resources and insufficient time**

Critical conflicts in HEI B centred on a lack of resources and the related lack of time.

“there are so few of us doing so much that we don't have the time” B2.

“Funding, finance you know to get a team together it takes time and somebody has to pay their salary so it is funding and then they are probably the main things, and the other part might be skill sets” B3.

“We have to be strategic in what we do because we have very limited resources so we have to pick the projects that meet our bottom line and their interest and that type of thing” B4.



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“We would like to develop more online approaches but we do not have the developmental time to do that, so it impacts on us absolutely directly from a resources perspective. Finance has improved slightly, but...it does impact on us in a fundamental way because we are responsible for many of the licenses for software and hardware and these are recurring costs and every year we have to find money right up to the line literally so that is a real struggle, so when a service is no longer available it is not senior management that gets it and that is our position” B2.

The lack of resources and time can be traced back to the primary contradiction in the changing exchange and use value of the academic with the transition to blended learning. The HEI has paid the exchange value of the academic and expects an equivalent use value in return. However, blended learning requires additional resources, in the form of educational technology and additional skills, which the HEI has to resource either through employing additional people or upskilling existing academic staff. This additional demand on resources reduces the use value of the academic, while the exchange value stays the same.

“You know if we don’t do, you mentioned animation, we don’t really have a budget for animation where screen casts, creating collaborate ultra videos or that kind of thing, they are all really cheap. So we would tend to look at creating something that is within [the academic’s] skill set after we have provided training” B3.

The change in exchange and use value is also reflected in the critical conflicts over time.

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“Is it teaching? Is it research? Is it blended? Where do we come on that list is more the issue than the structures that support the approval process and so that is the challenge – [academics] have more to do. I mean their teaching time is key but their research time is key so where do we fit in if it is kind of teaching with a blended approach” B4.

Previously the use value of the academic was taken up with time to teach and time to do research. Blended, however, can require additional development and delivery time, which means the academic is required to do additional tasks but for the same exchange value.

“It is more simple things like time and resources to do work I think and there is growing demands on [academics] to be involved in particular [HEIs] and research so that gives less time to maybe other pieces of work like developing course content or for online” B4.

“I think if you were to define it so clearly I think it would start costing you more maybe and in different ways and you mightn’t just get, I think a lot of things are done on good will but I see the limitations of that as well I do. So I don’t know. I don’t know the answer to that really” B4.

While participant B4 above does not have the answer, HEI B has taken a number of steps to address this primary contradiction manifested in critical conflicts over time and resources. HEI B’s response to this primary contradiction is a BLAS that was categorised above as being largely new managerial. In contrast to a collegial response, which expects more of the academic for the same exchange value, a new managerial approach accepts the reduced use value of the academic and makes up the shortfall by a combination of bringing in additional skill, as well as upskilling the academics.

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It has also adopted a more systematic approach to the development and delivery of blended learning in a more collaborative environment.

“So it is very much a hands on, everybody is helping everybody else so I think that is more in the vibe that they have got going there” B1.

#### **4.4.1.9 Double Binds: Working professionally without offending academically**

The new managerial response to the primary contradiction introduces its own secondary contradictions between elements in the BLAS manifested as double binds. For example, a professional coordinator managing the development and delivery of the blended learning course can be stuck between doing his/her job and offending the academic-centric cultural norm of the organisation.

“There is a lot invested in the relationship between the disciplines and you don’t want to say something in a way that is going to offend someone and I don’t know about you but sometimes with [academics] there is a hierarchical method of communicating with administrative units and in that [academic’s] case you just felt like look I’m an academic, I have my PhD and I know what I am doing. I am not going to be told by an administrative unit how to teach an online course, so I don’t know if you ever come across that but it happens from time to time” B3

“Sometimes we come across [academics] who was appointed by a [HoD]...and I meet with that person to go through ok this is what we can and can’t do and after the meeting with them I just had to write to the [HoD] saying you can’t use this person. That they are not open to the idea, they are still very rigidly in the

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traditional face-to-face thinking pedagogy of how you deliver”  
B3.

“sometimes we just can’t support somebody and that is how it is so we move on and we kind of decide if there is anything else in the future we can work with” B4.

This double bind is a manifestation of the secondary contradiction between the rules, the cultural norms of the organisation, and the subject and also between the rules and the artefacts used to manage the development and delivery of blended learning.

“It’s all hard work and you know cajoling and getting the right people and convincing them that is actually good for them to do this” B4.

“It is a team challenged with a task to create the content and so that is how it is seen to be supporting and I suppose we are still supporting subject matter people too to develop the content. A lot of them are struggling with that so I think we have to take that approach, otherwise we won’t get very far with them I would imagine” B4.

#### **4.4.1.10 Tertiary Contradictions: Clashing with the older structures**

As stated, tertiary contradictions emerge “as people attempt to use a new model while many established practices retain currency” (Bligh & Flood, 2015). With HEI B adopting a largely new managerial approach to managing blended learning development and delivery, there tends to be new practices for the new model.

“By tidying things up and managing workflow and workloads better it means we are working in a more enhanced way in

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that we are working in a way that we are project orientated rather than reactive” B2.

“It is very systematic and in that way because it is systematic it is easier to manage and then because it is very much about a style adopted and a methodology about it that people coming into the process are more inclined to engage because it is clearer to them what they are going to do, what they have to do, what their colleagues have done before them” B3.

“the audio visual really isn’t or increasingly is not your traditional audio visual support, they are much more engaged in learning spaces, so they are far more consultative basis on the design and enhancement of learning spaces...So the audio visual support is increasingly being seen as a learning space, so that means we have to develop structures to they can work more with the technology team on that aspect and the learning technology team we see everybody as involved in supporting, everybody as pedagogically people in some way, so the [educational technologists] are not just technologists they are essential to developing pedagogy and to think in terms of good pedagogy” B2.

However, in introducing new practices for new models, participants reported on contradictions with past versions of how courses are developed.

But they do tend to stay in their clusters within their program you know so the people who are chosen to work on that program are always huddled together and working on that program and then they might come to [the educational technologist] with a question and they go back and so they

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are just getting used to [the educational technologist] being there as well” B1.

“where it drives me mad that we can’t respond more quickly to needs. Like say recently we had...one organisation wanted some of our modules to offer them on an individual basis and to do this we needed to put on a new stream to offer it through our online application system so these modules would sit on their own but there is now, after the closing date for all the approval processes have passed, there is no way to set up this new stream but then I had to just try and figure a workaround so that is annoying. That it is not as responsive, not as flexible. The system isn’t flexible enough I think for change” B3.

“HR those core central services like HR and finance they kind of the pace of response that we might need is not met by the need of the pace from some of those core services... we are constantly coming up against the inflexibility of these central systems against the more dynamic model that we fit” B2.

“professional departments loose out because obviously and we understand the logic it doesn’t make sense, the logic is if the teaching programme is making money then fine we will hire another lecturer rather than get another educational developer that will enhance teaching across the [HEI], so we struggle with that” B2.

The tertiary contradictions highlighted emphasises a gap between what the blended learning manager needs from the HEI’s structures and processes and what the older structures and processes are providing. There is a distinction between how the HEI operates and how academics prefer to operate and the

new managerially collaborative, cross discipline, cross department project managed approach illustrated by HEI B's BLAS.

#### 4.4.1.11 Quaternary Contradictions: An organisation within an organisation

The neighbouring activity system against which to assess quaternary contradictions is HEI B's review of programmes, as the policies and procedures for course approval are not available from HEI B. This programme review process feeds into the rules element of the BLAS for HEI B.

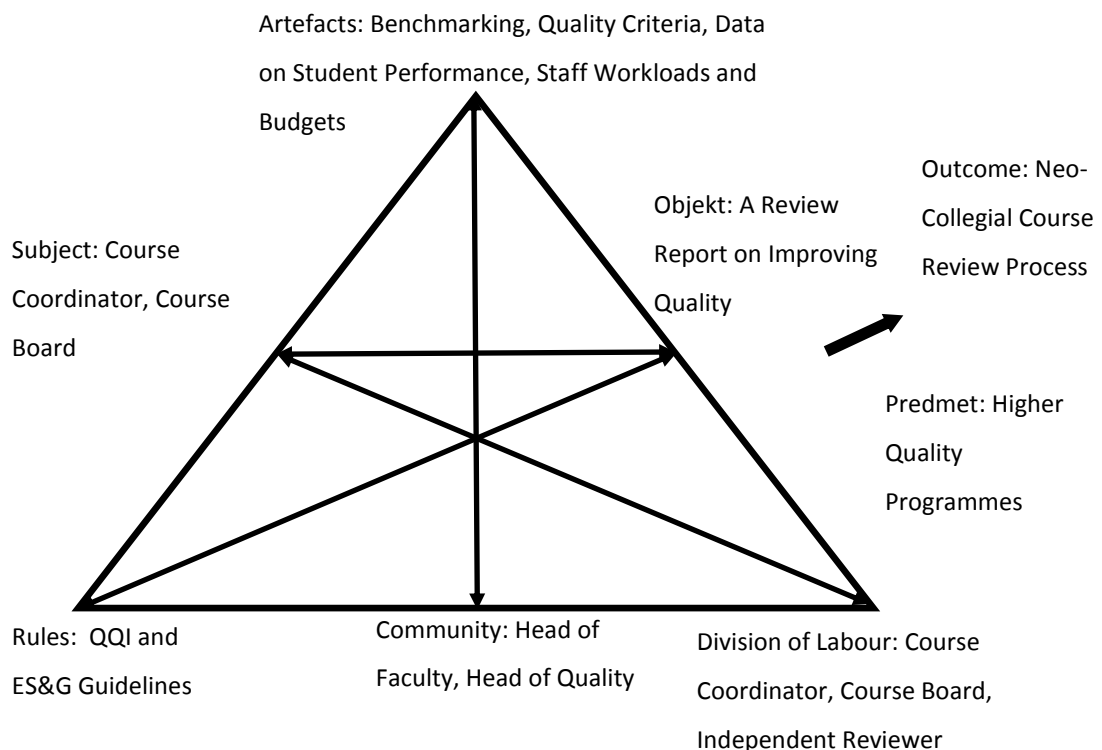


Fig 4.5 ASM of HEI B's Review of Programmes

The subject of the review of programmes activity is the course coordinator and the course board, which are collectively responsible for the review process. The predmet of the review, as outlined in the review policies and procedures, is the development of higher quality by ensuring that staff have the ability to assess and enhance quality and performance. The objekt of the activity is to produce a review report that contains important new ideas for changes to the

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way in which the course board can improve quality and performance. The artefacts used in the activity are benchmarking against similar HEIs and quality criteria, although the benchmarking criteria and the quality criteria are not stated. Other artefacts used are data on student admissions, progression and completion and on budgets and staff workloads. The rules that govern the assessment of quality in course review are defined as QQI's *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (QQI, 2016) and the *Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ES&G, 2015). As stated above in the discussion of quaternary contradictions in HEI A, QQI's guidelines are to be supplemented with the future publication of guidelines for blended learning (QQI, 2017), and ES&G's guidelines do not refer to blended learning (ES&G, 2015). In terms of the division of labour, the tasks of the review activity are divided out between the course coordinator, the course board and a course board appointed independent reviewer. The community in the course review activity are the head of quality and the head of school or faculty. The outcome of this neighbouring activity is a space, an opportunity, for those involved in the course to assess and enhance quality and performance.

It would appear that the course review activity is not overly prescriptive. The head of quality and head of the faculty have an oversight role, but the outcome of the course review activity appears to be within the control of the professional coordinator and the course team. Therefore, the outcome of the course review activity, which feeds into the rules element of the BLAS, is within the control of the professional coordinator and the course team. The use of benchmarking against similar HEIs, including an external expert in the review process, and utilising quality control criteria are instruments associated with a new managerialist management approach. That said, the subject of the activity is the course board including the course coordinator, which suggests a more collegial approach to decision-making. Having the professional coordinator as one of the subjects of the review activity suggests that the blended aspects of the course and the new managerialist approach to managing development and delivery of the course are taken into consideration



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during the review. Moreover, the task of benchmarking against similar courses in other HEIs, suggests that the review process can take into consideration the blended mode of delivery. While there is an external member of the review process, a need to meet undefined quality criteria and oversight provided by the heads of faculty, the review process appears to be owned by the course board, including the professional course coordinator. In what could be argued is a neo-collegial course review process, this neighbouring activity's outcome—create an opportunity to review the course performance and quality—does not appear to be in contradiction with the objective of the BLAS. If anything, it appears to complement it by allowing sufficient scope for the course board to determine the nature of quality and performance. The collegial academic freedom of the review process, ironically, allows for a largely new managerial approach to managing the development and delivery of blended learning to co-exist beside otherwise collegial structures and processes.

“so that we have a rule book for that but we have devised our own centre, our own project guidelines and our own design guidelines which we would use so they are very much how we do it” B4.

The quaternary contradiction is not apparent between neighbouring activities, however, the outcome of the neighbouring activity does appear to allow for the existence of an alternative management approaches to co-exist within the same HEI. Therefore, what the examination of the neighbouring activity has revealed is that two apparently contradictory ways of managing a course can co-exist within the same HEI.

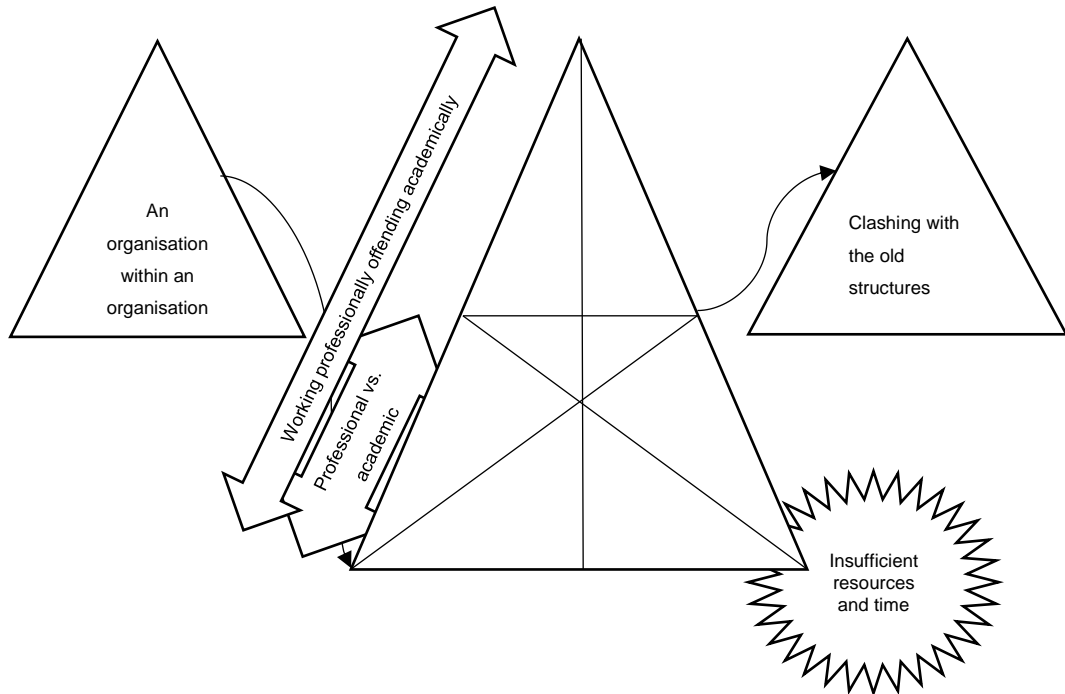


Fig. 4.6 Summary of Contradictions in HEI B's BLAS

The neighbouring activity that generates the rules for HEI B's BLAS is illustrated in figure 4.6 a quaternary contradiction in that it facilitates the existence of an organisation within an organisation. Figure 4.6 also shows the primary contradiction within the division of labour element and the two identified secondary contradictions, one between the rules and artefact element and one between the rules and the artefact element. Finally, figure 4.6 illustrates the tertiary contradiction in clashing with the old structures when maintaining an organisation within an organisation with the different practices that have evolved to achieve a new objekt.

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#### **4.5. HEI C**

HEI C's teaching and learning strategy identifies the development of more blended learning courses as a clearly defined strategic goal. The document details a number of specific targets for blended learning courses, the building of technical infrastructure and increased staff training that are to be achieved in order to realise the blended learning goal. This goal and subsequent targets are reflected in HEI C's Performance Management Compact with the HEA. All course development and delivery in HEI C is discipline based. HEI C has a T&L department that includes a TEL unit. Unlike HEI A, where they were discipline based, the educational developers and the educational technologist are centrally based in HEI C within either the T&L department or the TEL Unit inside the T&L department.

#### 4.5.1. Description of HEI C's BLAS

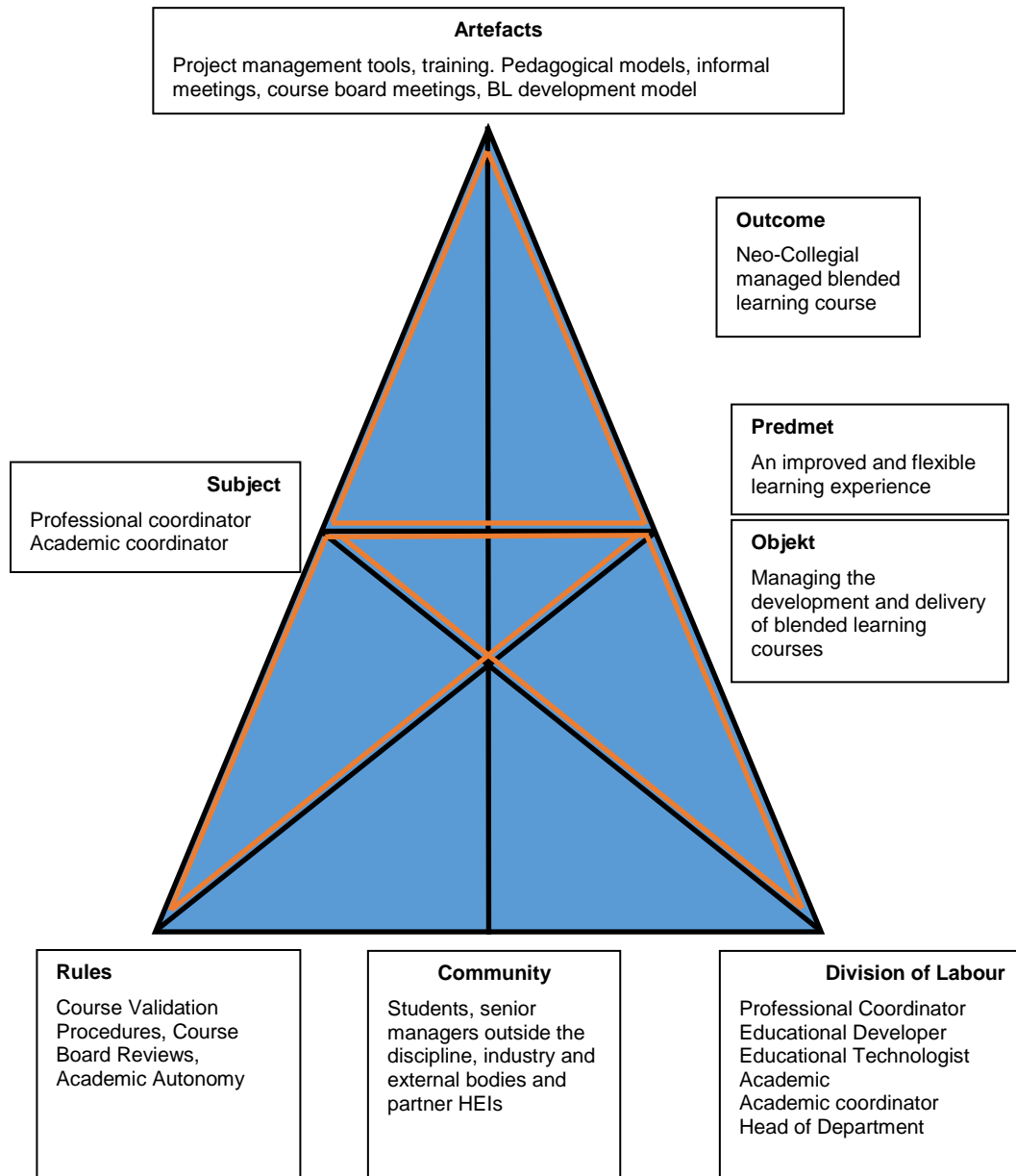


Fig. 4.7 BLAS for HEI C

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#### 4.5.1.1 Subject: The academic-professional coordinator

With HEI C, the subject, that is the person or people responsible for managing the development and delivery of a blended learning course, is a composite of a professional coordinator and an academic coordinator. Some participants stated that the subject was the academic coordinator.

“Well I suppose [the academic coordinator] manage it really in the sense of (s)he makes sure that all the modules are there for the students. [The academic coordinator] liaises, [the academic coordinator is] the kind of primary point of contact between the [TEL Unit] and...if there is an issue they would contact [the academic coordinator] first” C2.

However, the professional coordinator is more than just an advisor as was the case in HEI A. The professional coordinator also takes on responsibilities for managing the development and delivery of the course.

“[the professional coordinator] would be responsible then...with assigning relevant tasks to an [educational technologist] who would be dedicated to actually working with that particular blended program. [The professional coordinator] would work with them and...would also work with the [academic coordinator] as well” C1.

“[The TEL unit] would create the program structure on the [LMS]...[the TEL unit] also creates then a structure that would be associated you know units, lessons, activities, assessments all that stuff” C1.

There is also the suggestion that the subject was a combination of the professional and academic coordinator.

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“I see it [the management of the blended learning course] as very much a shared enterprise which is really interesting” C3.

Although, there was a lack of clarity.

It’s a confusing, because it’s a new departure, it’s a new development the amount of blended learning courses that are being created...there hasn’t necessarily been a definition for who is the person or what role should actually be seen as ultimately the manager of it. It can almost feel like they’re being jointly managed from a number of different perspectives C1.

Therefore, it would appear that the subject is a composite of both the academic coordinator and the academic coordinator, although not all participants would agree with that conclusion and there would appear to be a lack of clarity around this in HEI C that did not exist in either HEI B or HEI A.

#### **4.5.1.2 Object-ive: Manage a blended learning course to widen participation by offering a more flexible learning environment**

HEI C’s teaching and learning strategy has as a goal the increase of blended learning courses, but the document does not link that goal directly with a rationale. While the strategy discusses many of the ways in which it seeks to maintain excellence in teaching and learning and further the interests of the HEI, it does not connect the development of blended learning to any of its aspirations, so the object (predmet) behind the development of blended learning courses is not reflected in the teaching and learning strategy. In response to why HEI C is developing blended learning courses, participants primarily discussed the potential to widen student participation and improve the learning experience.

“Potentially anything that can potentially improve the quality of delivery and widen access is something that we should be

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involved in... so blended learning is a way of helping more people that geographically from dispersed locations to participate in a program” C3.

“The pedagogical benefit and the enhancement that it can provide by reconceptualising learning and basically breaking it down into a blended format for peoples’ flexibility” C1.

“you meet academic staff who are hugely interested in this mode of learning and in the way that people can get to a deeper level of learning in a blended approach” C1.

“To facilitate the learner who may not be able to access a program on a full time basis” C2.

The knock on business effect of widening participation and increasing student numbers is not blatantly stated but is alluded to in the participants’ responses. Rather, satisfying business goals was seen as a natural consequence of improving the learning experience and making it more flexible. The object-ive of HEI C’s BLAS would appear to be the management of the development and delivery of a blended learning course (objekt) in order to widen student participation through an improved and flexible learning experience (predmet). The problem for the subject in the case of HEI C is managing a process for blended learning development and delivery that improves the student experience while widening participation.

#### **4.5.1.3 Artefacts: Academic meetings and project management tools**

Given that the subject is a composite of the academic and professional coordinator, the artefacts that mediate the relationship between the subject and the object-ive are the artefacts utilised by both the academic and professional coordinator. The academic coordinator tended to manage through meetings. These meetings, which were informal or in the course of

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day-to-day working, were between the academic and professional coordinator, between the academic coordinator and other academics teaching on the course and between the academic coordinator and the discipline head of department.

Formal course board meetings are required by the rules governing course development and delivery and they would be used to influence how the course is developed and delivered.

“that might be something [guidelines for developing and delivering the course] that will need to be teased out kind of at the course board” C2.

Attendance at the formal meetings, such as the course board meetings, is restricted to the academics teaching on the course and the academic coordinator.

[TEL Unit] don't have input into let's say you know curriculum redesign meetings that they might have at a [department] level... there is no overarching programmatic curriculum engagement that [the TEL Unit] has been invited to be part of yet from an institutional perspective” C1.

The other management tools that were discussed by participants were utilised by the professional coordinator, such as templates, workflow models and pedagogical models.

“we use a range of different models, if you take like theories of learning, we would be looking at the cognitivist, the social constructivist, all of those theories of learning and thinking are relevant” C1.



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“in terms of instructional design we would be looking at different types of models as well, depending on the specific case, you could have Dick and Carey system approach model or Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction or Blooms Taxonomy of Learning.....[we] also try to adhere to principles of universal design” C1.

As with HEI A and HEI B, training was also used as an artefact by the professional coordinator to mediate the development and delivery of the course.

[The TEL unit] usually provides professional development workshops to all academic staff that are involved in creating these blended learning outputs, see now [the TEL unit] would have a phased approach to the design and development and delivery of any program C1.

It was noted that these artefacts were used in a bespoke manner, whereby the right pedagogical or design model was used to help manage behaviour and decisions that were appropriate for a particular circumstance, academic or module.

“You can’t map one simple model and theory or whatever on to many separate disciplines. I do think that you do need to interpret things that you are creating in a blended way depending on who you are engaging with and the type of thing they are trying to create” C1.

“[The TEL] unit would let [academics] know as to what kinds of materials and technological aspects are available...and what might suit certain modules and so on and what might suit certain models and so on and what might suit certain

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people...and then [academics] making the decision whether or not or how much [they] are going to get involved” C2.

The TEL unit at HEI C has a clearly defined and documented process for blended learning course development, which covers training needs analysis, professional development, a mechanism for scheduling the creation of online content and an outline of how the development and delivery of the course can be supported by the unit. The defined process is an artefact rather than a rule because the decision by an academic to engage with the process is voluntary. The models and the development process do appear to have been used to manage and shape the development of content, learning activities and assessments by promoting them during training, workshops and subsequent meetings involving academics and the educational technologist and professional coordinator.

“so [the TEL unit] create a template to insert the content into that template based upon obviously the workshops...on instructional design and...then after that’s done they send it back to [the TEL unit]...and the dedicated member...would review that from an instructional design standpoint then and they would have a spreadsheet where they would document any amendments or changes” C1.

Participants reported using educational technologies, including online discussion boards, Articulate, Adobe connect, wikis and online quizzes, which are used to make reusable learning objects (RLOs) that are made available to students through the LMS. These technologies are also artefacts to manage the development and delivery of the course in that they mediate aspects of managing the course such as decision making, allocation of tasks or which personnel are involved.

“in order to deliver that content [academics] would be very dependent on [the TEL] unit to help us with all the

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technological aspects of it and to make the material that [academics] are converting we'll say into this blended format attractive and accessible for the students" C2.

The level of dependence would appear to be mediated by the type of educational technologies used and the changing and developing skill set of the academic staff. As was noted with HEI A, there is a sense that the educational technologists in the TEL unit also take on the role of artefacts, whereby the academics internalise what they learn from the TEL unit and then stop using them.

"so I suppose as programs have developed I think the [TEL] unit are particularly supportive in the initial phases but I think once [academics] get comfortable with it then it's a case of letting [academics] fly" C2

"we tend to empower our academic staff here if possible to take ownership for creating their own learning activities, their own [online] content" C1.

#### **4.5.1.4 Division of labour: Horizontal and vertical cross-department, cross-role delegation**

The operations and actions that make up the activity required to develop and deliver a blended learning course are divided up among five roles that span academic and professional departments.

"you would have [academic coordinator] who would mainly be academic staff, you would have module design teams then that are made up of your academic staff similarly and there would be a partnership approach then with basically the [T&L department] and the [TEL unit] which exist within that and obviously depending on what infrastructure and

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resources were required and all that [computer services] would be involved” C1.

Computer services have a horizontal division of labour relationship with the professional and academic coordinators, in that they are brought in for their expertise.

“in the case of Blended learning [computer services] sees itself as the enabler” C3.

depending on what infrastructure and resources were required and all that [computer services] would be involved also...they would be involved more so in making sure that the delivery was possible C1.

There is a vertical division of labour relationship between the professional coordinator and the educational technologists.

[educational technologists] are kind of assigned a project work...we would hope to have one person dedicated to each project that we were involved in. Tasks like [LMS] administration would be usually one person or two people C1.

The division of labour between the academic coordinator and the academic is more of a horizontal relationship. The academic is brought in because of their subject matter expertise and are free to develop their modules accordingly.

“the academic should have sovereignty and autonomy over the way they deliver their programs” C3.

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There also appears to be a horizontal relationship between academics and educational technologists.

“there would be kind of a merry dance then between the [academic] and the [educational technologist] until that one particular...lesson comes to basically an end and then it’s...the [educational technologist] in the unit their responsibility to actually publish the lesson and host it on the [LMS] C1.

“it’s kind of symbiotic really I suppose is the way to describe it because [the TEL unit] have a very what I would call a good pedagogical knowledge as to how best to support a person who is accessing material online” C2.

The [academics] are effectively inviting the [TEL unit] in to help them with it and it is very much the case that the [TEL unit] are the helpers, but they are so good at it that natural partnerships take root...[the TEL unit is] enabling, they are providers, but they are becoming integral as well at the same time” C3.

The only authority based vertical division of labour relationship is between the professional coordinator and the educational technologists. The other division of labour relationships are based on expertise and would be defined as horizontal.

#### **4.5.1.5 Community: Throughout the organisation and beyond**

The community in HEI C’s BLAS, that is those who are affected by the activity, is also quite wide in comparison with HEI A and HEI B, stretching across the organisation and beyond, including students, senior managers outside the discipline, industry and external bodies and partner HEIs. The senior management team was credited with making a commitment to blended

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learning, providing resources for the endeavour and then making organisation changes to allow for greater collaboration and co-operation.

“we have a strategic plan...[that]... signposts the road for us in terms of blended learning and also in terms of the general development of [computer services], but particularly teaching and learning and that is based on consultation but also close liaison with the director of teaching and learning, heads of department, the teams of [academics] and director of [computer services] and anybody else relevant in that kind of leadership role” C3.

it was absolutely essential that our [computer services] and our [TEL unit] were kind of two halves of the same wall in terms of teaching and learning...so what we did was to actually make them effectively an extension of the [computer services] team and with a dual report relationship between the director of teaching and learning but also to the director of [computer services] which meant that they didn't have to be going through the director of teaching and learning to get something out of [computer services] C3.

It should also be noted that in its 2014 compact with the HEA (HEA, 2017e), HEI C acknowledged the need to restructure the organisation in order to meet the challenges of an increased use of educational technology and more cross-department collaboration.

Students influence the development and delivery of the course through formalised feedback reported through the course board meetings. The external examiner is another formal mediator on the course development and delivery.

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“from an academic point of view the program has an external examiner at some point that oversees the academic rigor of the program if you like and I suppose we do engage as well in feedback and evaluation of students and from staff as well so that’s how I suppose really how it would be monitored to date” C2.

National organisations are also a mediating factor from both a funding perspective and in influencing the national conversation on blended learning in HE.

“Again the kind of partnership around Blended learning that prevails locally...grew out of those targeted funding initiatives from the mid-2000...which also had a Blended learning and technology theme to it...and then there is a very good interaction with the National Forum for Teaching and Learning at national level” C3.

#### **4.5.1.6 Rules: HEI in transition**

It was reported that there were no specific rules for the development and delivery of blended learning courses outside the rules used to govern non-blended learning courses.

“I suppose we are operating under kind of our college’s kind of academic guidelines and agreements...I mean I think you know the same kinds of, same rules apply to the students as apply in a face-to-face course” C2.

A noted recent change to the rules on course approval was the requirement for academics to consult with the TEL Unit prior to presenting a blended learning course for approval.

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“what we have done is to ensure that in any module design and approval form...needs to tag the fact that it will require [TEL Unit] support to kind of quantitative extent and that means that the [TEL Unit] can have an early warning on it and can start looking at the pedagogy again and whether they can deliver what is being touted” C3.

Some of the issues that came up in discussions on rules and regulations included lecturers delivering online tutorials from home, ownership of online teaching material and providing the students with the same level of support afforded daytime students.

“the institutional ownership of the actual material as well that once it is created...I suppose this is particularly in relation to material like such on Articulate that you know kind of just there we’ll say transferable yeah...and that becomes the property of the college I think from an institutional point of view the material could have been [transferred] but you know the lecturers involved made the decision to treat the module and do it a slightly different way because they weren’t quite comfortable with you know using the other material of the person that wasn’t involved in that module” C2.

“I think it is to do [deliver an online tutorial] from home if they can, you know if they have the appropriate material I think they can... I’m not sure I know that it was certainly mentioned by the [TEL Unit] that that was an option, I don’t know if anybody has actually done that yet” C2.

More than one participant reported that work on providing more official guidelines on blended learning was underway.



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“developing that policy to have it ready to go now and in that policy there will be guidelines, recommendations, you know minimum criteria for the [LMS] and all that in terms of program and module design that we would be involved in” C1.

“I think it probably would need a little bit of more thought and caution and kind of, and so on, and I think it just needs a little bit more I suppose more rules and regulations” C2.

“We are a little bit of both [old and new rules] but moving I think more swiftly and assertively towards building the rules based environment through our policies and protocols” C3.

The rules element also refers to implicit rules, such as cultural norms. Academic autonomy was the most clearly defined cultural norm or rule that mediates the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses.

“I think ultimately we wouldn’t seek to interfere with the autonomy of academics in the development of their courses” C3.

“the academic should have sovereignty and autonomy over the way they deliver their programs” C3.

#### **4.5.1.7 The Outcome: Neo-collegially managed course**

Looking back at the management typology for blended learning courses and answering the questions in Table 2.5 for HEI C:

**Rationale:** The rationale behind blended learning courses in HEI C is to increase student numbers by producing an improved and more flexible learning environment.

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“so blended learning is a way of helping more people that geographically from dispersed locations to participate in a program” C3.

**Driver:** The growth of blended learning is a target in HEI Cs strategy and steps have been taken at senior management level to facilitate achieving that goal.

We did pre-empt it. All of our directors come together on a quarterly basis to look at their plans collectively and that is very useful because the organisation has gotten bigger” C3”.

Interesting infrastructural changes to accommodate blended learning are also a target of HEI C’s strategy and performance compact with the HEA. In goal setting and actions, HEI C is driving the development of blended learning from the top.

“Our (president) wanted clarity. He wanted seamlessness, planning, checks and counter checks and all those kind of things. Good governance and leadership management. So he wanted it to happen. The (registrar) posted the structures. He said that will work and we put it into place and it coincided with growth and teaching and blended learning and the ICT services team developing the way that I described some of the things” C3.

There is also evidence of a commitment at lower levels of HEI C to drive the development of blended learning. Therefore, the development of blended learning courses appears to be a top-down and bottom up phenomenon in HEI C.

**Organisation:** Blended learning is being centrally organised by utilising the decentralised discipline-based organisation.

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“blended learning evolved in such a kind of a pocketed way it’s that they come up with first the structure and then might look for help but it is very discipline specific engagement that we would have without doubt” C1.

While blended learning is not as centrally controlled as it is in HEI B, the organisation is not as decentralised as in HEI A. Educational developers and technologists are centrally based, as are computer services technicians, and the professional coordinator has a delegating role, being more than an advisor.

**Leader:** Blended learning development and delivery is being co-led by the academic and professional coordinator in HEI C. The professional coordinator in HEI C is involved in curriculum design, is a line manager for the educational technologists and uses a number of project management tools with a defined blended learning development model. The academic coordinator is recognised as the course leader, acts as a liaison between academic staff and educational technologists, manages the course board meetings and reports to the head of department on the course.

**Staff dynamic:** With HEI C, the staff appear to be working toward a collaborative staff dynamic, with most of the division of labour relationships being defined as horizontal within the BLAS. The educational technologists have more of a collaborative relationship with the academics than in HEI A.

“so the (TEL) unit in (HEI C) would exist within the (T&L unit ) but any program that would be deemed to be on offer initially as blended learning (the TEL unit) would have a large hand in that program design and delivery. Also obviously the academic or the subject matter expert, they would be involved be that in module design teams or in program design teams sometimes that are set out” C1.

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The TEL unit is committed to empowering the academic staff and moving them away over time from needing to have a working relationship with the TEL unit.

That all kind of is with initially blended learning unit person but the idea is to empower all academic staff to be able to do that themselves in time” C1.

This would suggest the members of the TEL unit start off as collaborators but then become artefacts whose knowledge and experience is internalised by academics, who stop using the artefact as they pass through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of learning about blended learning. However, in the early years of blended learning development, the staff dynamic would primarily be collaborative in HEI C, where the division of labour relationships would primarily be horizontal.

**Development process:** The project management tools and the model for blended learning development adopted by the professional coordinator and the TEL unit in HEI C indicates a systematic development process.

“so we use a range of different models....you could have Dick and Carey system approach model or Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction or Blooms Taxonomy of Learning or a number of those particular instruction design models” C1.

The academic freedom to buy in to the process or not indicates that the option for iterative development that can borrow from the systematic approach as needs be indicates that the development process, unlike HEI B, which is totally systematic. The exclusion of the professional coordinator from the course boards and curriculum design meetings would also suggest that there are limits to how systematic an approach can be adopted. Again, as with the other attributes above, HEI C appears to occupy a middle ground between systematic and iterative.

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The **outcome** of HEI C's BLAS is neither collegial nor new managerial. Looking at table 2.9, the description of the attributes for HEI C would suggest that it is most closely aligned to the neo-collegial column. Therefore, the outcome of HEI C's BLAS is a neo-collegial managed blended learning courses.

#### 4.5.2. Contradictions

As with the previous cases, the search for contradictions within HEI C's BLAS starts with reports of critical conflicts indicating the primary contradiction in the activity system. HEI C's distinct approach to resolving this contradiction lead to its own form of secondary contradictions manifest in double binds and extended into the discussion on tertiary and quaternary contradictions.

##### 4.5.1.8 Critical Conflict: The threat to traditional roles

With HEI C, the critical conflicts appear to centre on the division of labour and the roles of the staff involved in developing and delivering blended learning.

“Now our [academics] are not happy with this and are not comfortable with it and it looks like none of our [academics] will opt, certainly in the initial role out of this...so the program that was originally conceived as very much tilted towards blended learning as a delivery mechanism now is resigning from that a little bit” C3.

“Sometimes [academic] staff can be threatened by someone who is able to do certain things or teach in a different environment more so than what the [academic] if that makes sense” C1.

“It's like [academics] with anything, they won't necessarily do it” C3.

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“I mean they as in higher education sector doesn’t know where to position people with that skill set yet and a lot of the time they fall on the salary scales that are administrative, that they are seen as not being academic themselves, like I would fundamentally think that people in educational technology or instructional design or whatever...have kind of 3 disparate areas that you’re trying to pull together into 1 person, like you have your content knowledge, you have your pedagogical content knowledge, so the craft of how you teach that particular content, and then thirdly you have your educational technology knowledge or skill set or your instructional design skill set” C1

The perceived threat to the role of the academic and the subsequent resistance highlighted above was portrayed in the literature as a threat to, and a defence of, academic integrity. However, it can also be interpreted as an illustration of the reduction in the academic’s use value compared to the exchange value with the transition to blended learning. The response by HEI C to this primary contradiction has been to adopt as collaborative approach as possible and has therefore been classed above as being neo-collegial.

#### **4.5.1.9 Double Binds: Is collaboration and support compatible?**

The double binds that were reported in HEI C’s BLAS tend to be focussed on whether professional staff as collaborators with academic staff is accepted or not.

“sometimes depending on the specific department and depending on sometimes the characters within the specific department and their mentality towards blended learning as a genuine mode of delivery and way that people learn [the TEL unit] might always be stuck or feel like [its] stuck between support and partner” C1.

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This double bind, whether to genuinely collaborate or wait to be allowed to support, are manifestations of secondary contradictions between rules, in the form of academic freedom, and the division of labour between academic and professional staff.

“the institution wouldn’t seek to interfere with the autonomy of academics in the development of their courses” C3.

“[the TEL unit] showing [academics] what can be done with the technology and [academics] then making the decision whether or not or how much we are going to get involved” C2.

“sometimes it depends on the particular professional development offering that we are providing and sometimes it depends on who you are actually partnering, collaborating with or simply being seen to support” C1.

The role of the academic coordinator in liaising between the academics and the educational technologists appears to have been focussed on mediation around and through these contradictions.

“the kind of primary point of contact between the [TEL unit] and would be [the academic coordinator] you know if there is an issue [the TEL unit] would contact [the academic coordinator] who would be kind of trying to iron out” C2.

The power of academic freedom to determine the nature of the relationship between academic and professional staff appears to prevent the possibility of genuine collaboration across professional and academic staff.

“it just depends on a lot of small things about what we are overall seen as being you know a support department or

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someone that people can genuinely collaborate and actually consult with” C1.

“But if you have become autonomous in your and your confidence has developed to such that you are confident deliverant, well I suppose you could exist without the [TEL unit] but I suppose it depends really on your own persona as to how much you know technology does develop at such great rates that you’d like to feel that you would be open enough to continue that link [with the TEL unit] and not to discard it altogether you know” C2.

#### **4.5.1.10 Tertiary: Will collaboration survive or be subsumed?**

The contradictions between the rules, artefacts and division of labour of HEI C’s BLAS extend into tertiary contradictions as old processes are retained despite the new outcome of a more collaborative development and delivery environment.

“I suppose obviously you don’t realise sometimes how much you need to advocate for certain things. And you do meet resistance and if people as you said there if they’re used to teaching in a certain way again that whole hammer and nail idea they will simply... try to map as easily what they can from a traditional environment into a blended or online environment using as little as possible that will change their current practices” C1.

Conscious efforts were made in HEI C to counter the reluctance to move toward a more collaborative working environment.

“we nailed a lot of the problems that existed you know between member of staff and we just put them out there and we said look we are going to have a different approach and



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we are going to try and make this a real team and a quality of life at work is going to be part of what we do for you, enabling you as professionals” C3.

Although rather than moving toward a more collaborative work environment, the sense among academics is that they could subsume the additional knowledge and expertise and revert to the old processes, similar to what HEI A was striving toward.

“if academics become very, very proficient at using the technology you know it does, you would wonder about how much suppose they will need into the future and then ultimately you will wonder I suppose about you know the future of education and what way it will evolve and so on you know so I suppose that’s an interesting issue” C2.

#### **4.5.1.11 Quaternary: Insufficient rules**

The activity of approving academic programmes is the neighbouring activity being considered for HEI C. The outcome of this activity feeds into the rules element of the BLAS for HEI C.

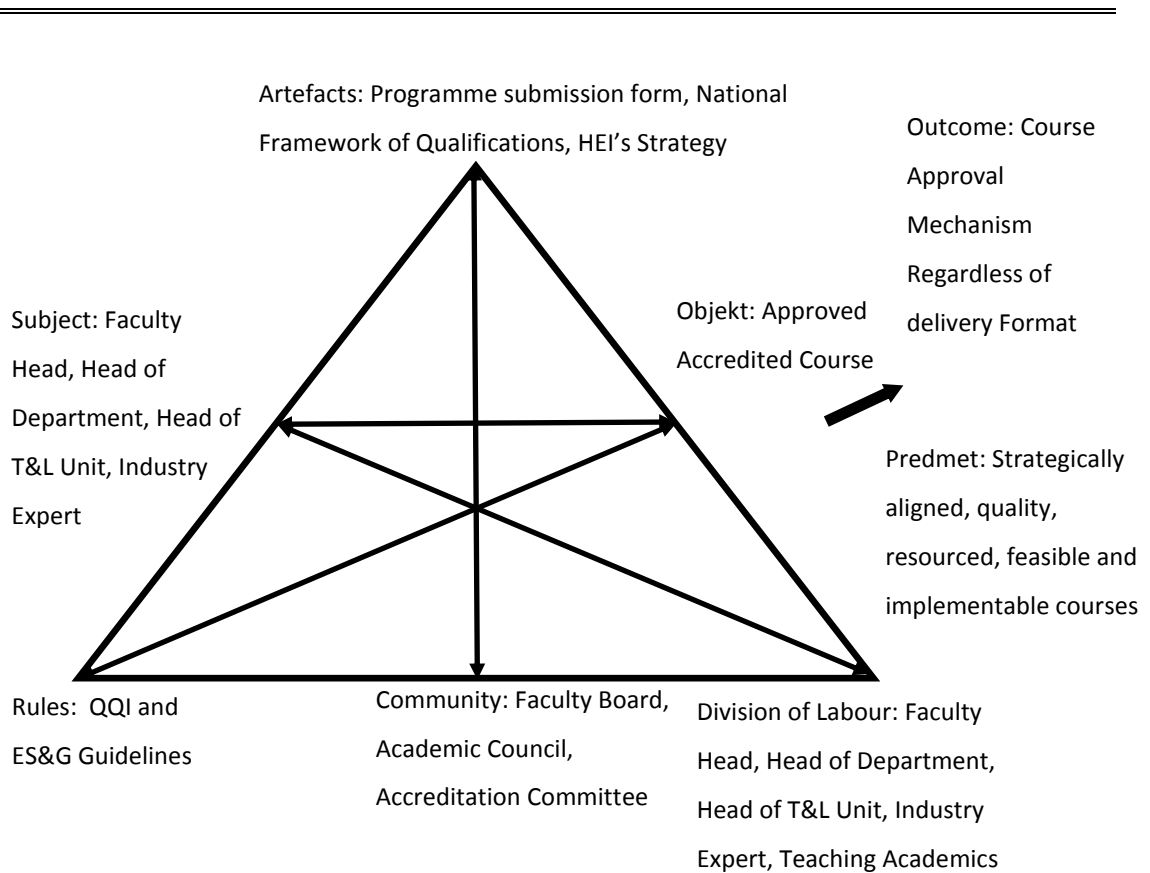


Fig 4.8 ASM of HEI C's Course Approval Process

The objekt of the approval activity is an approved accredited course, and the predmet of the activity is to ensure that only courses approved are sufficiently strategically aligned, feasible and properly resourced to make them implementable. According to HEI C's *Accreditation of Academic Programmes*, the subjects in this activity are the programme design team, made up of faculty and department heads, the head of the T&L unit and an industry expert. The artefacts used to mediate the approval process include the HEI's strategy, the National Framework of Qualifications and the *Accreditation of Academic Programmes - Programme submission* and Module descriptor forms, which outline contact and independent study time, assessment strategy, learning outcomes and rationale. The labour for this activity is divided between the subjects, administrative staff and the academics responsible for the modules. The community for the programme approval activity consists of relevant faculty boards, the accreditation committee and the academic council.

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The outcome of this neighbouring activity is an approval process that does not take into consideration the implications of mode of delivery. Here in lies the contradiction; a specific mode of delivery is stipulated in the objective of the BLAS for HEI C, but the approval activity that provides the rules for the BLAS does not offer rules to regulate the mode of delivery. In the *Accreditation of Academic Programmes - Programme submission document* for a particular course, a reference is made to the course being blended. The practicalities of how the course becomes blended are not mentioned, however. There is a reference in the resources section that the TEL unit will provide staff and student training and inductions on using educational technology is the only other mention of the blended format. The quaternary contradiction here is that the activity to define the rules to regulate a blended learning course does not take into consideration what makes a course blended. The need for additional rules and regulations for blended learning development and delivery was acknowledged by the participants indicating a disconnect between the activity systems of approving courses and the BLAS.

“We are a little bit of both but moving I think more swiftly and assertively towards building the rules based on environment through our policies and protocols. We don’t for example have a teaching and learning strategy or policy, but the objective to develop those are in our new strategic plan” C3.

“I haven’t all the answers to that one but I do think it is a very interesting way in which it can, and I think it probably would need a little bit of more thought and caution and kind of, and so on, and I think it just needs a little bit more I suppose more rules and regulations around it really you know. I think people are feeling their way around this one a little bit you know” C2.

“what we have done is to ensure that in any module design and approval form that, in other words the paper work that

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needs to put in place to purpose a change to a module or to develop a module, that our academic program approval committee that needs to tag the fact that it will require [TEL unit] support” C3.

“So it can be helpful in one regard but yet at the moment in terms of what the [TEL unit] does we are not invited to the table at faculty level” C1

In acknowledging a deficit in the rules governing the course approval, there is an acceptance among participants that this neighbouring activity needs to change if it is to helpfully inform the BLAS.

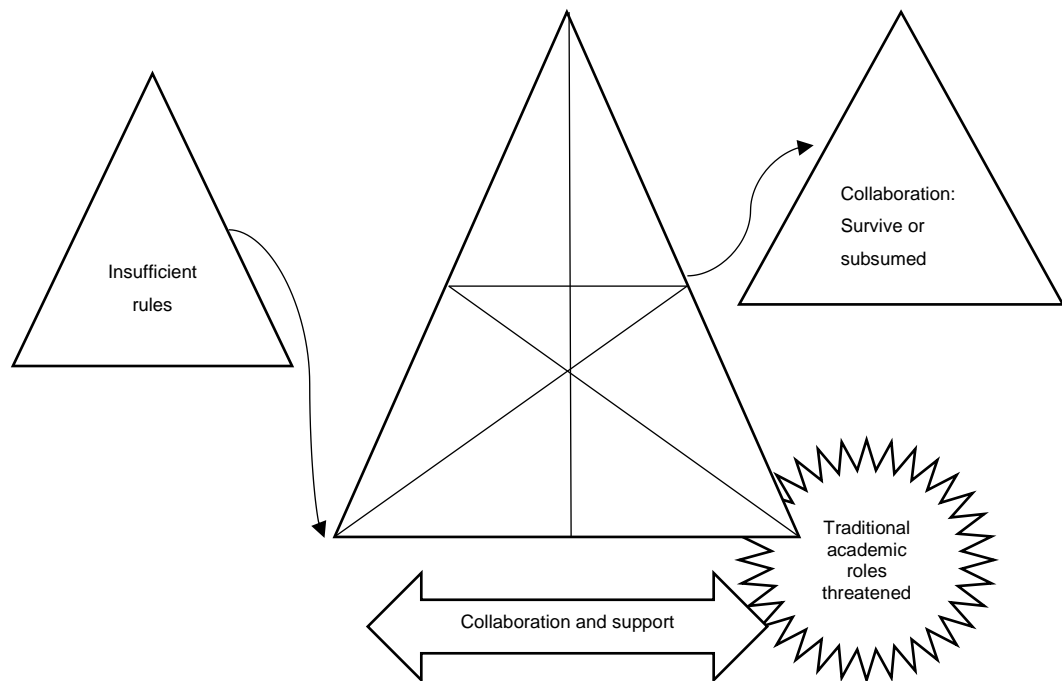


Fig. 4.9 Summary of Contradictions in HEI C's BLAS

The quaternary contradiction of an activity generating rules for a blended learning course that does not consider what makes a course blended is represented in Figure 4.9 as insufficient rules. Figure 4.9 also illustrates the primary contradiction manifested in the threat to the traditional academic role in the division of labour element and the secondary contradiction of collaboration versus support between the rules and division of labour elements. In terms of tertiary contradiction and the emergence of a new activity system, figure 4.9 shows how collaboration may survive or be subsumed into older processes if they continue to dominate or re-emerge.

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## Overview of Findings

In the Methodology chapter, it was stated that the aim of the study was to select cases based on literal replication with the idea that it would be possible to pull the three cases together into a composite case study that would have greater applicability to the sector than a single case. The cases explored, however, appear too distinct to be able to draw them together and develop a composite case. That said, there are some commonalities between the cases, as well as distinguishing aspects that are specific to each one.

### 4.6.1. Commonalities

Each of the three HEIs above share an aspiration to increase the blended learning courses as stated in their compacts with the HEA. The primary motivation (Object-ive Table 4.3) behind wanting more blended courses appears to be very similar; to increase the number of students by making the learning environment more flexible. There exists a unit, staffed by professional and academic staff, in each of the HEIs that has responsibility for encouraging and supporting the use of digital educational technology throughout the HEI. These TEL units offer training on educational technologies and technical support for developing and delivering blended courses. While the HEIs above may differ in their approach to changing rules to accommodate blended learning courses, essentially the regulatory framework within which courses are developed is quite similar across the three HEIs.

In terms of the contradictions (Table 4.4), each of the HEIs are responding to the same primary contradiction, the reduction in use value of the academic when the decision is made to take a course blended. This primary contradiction did manifest itself in different critical conflicts for each HEI. However, taken collectively, these critical conflicts reflect the type of challenges posed by blended learning for academics that were highlighted in the literature review—not enough time, not enough resources, excessive workloads, the need to upskill and a perceived threat to traditional academic roles. Similarly, the double binds highlighted are three different views of the same issue; is genuine collaboration between academic and professional staff

possible within a culture of academic freedom? The difference is that in HEI A, the double bind is seen from the academic perspective, in HEI B it is seen from the professional perspective and in HEI C there is no perspective, just the issue; how to collaborate.

The three HEIs share similar goals and motivation, and they are responding to the same primary contradiction while facing the same type of double binds. Therefore, the why and the what behind blended learning courses within the HEIs explored for this study appear to be quite similar.

ASM Element/HEI	A	B	C
Outcome	Collegially managed blended learning course	New managerial blended learning course	Neo-collegially managed blended learning course
Subject	Academic coordinator	Professional coordinator	Academic-professional coordinator
Object-ive	Managing the utilisation of educational technologies to attract more work-based students	Managing blended learning courses to satisfy students' needs for a flexible learning environment	Manage a blended learning course to widen participation by offering a more flexible learning environment
Artefact	The techniques of the TEL unit	Project management instruments	Academic meetings and project management tools
Division of Labour	Minimal horizontal delegation	Vertical cross-department, cross-role delegation	Horizontal and vertical cross-department, cross-role delegation
Community	Narrow and largely internal	Students, department, HEI and beyond	Throughout the organisation and beyond
Rules	Regular rules and irregular issues	Self-defined	HEI's in transition

Table 4.3 ASM elements compared

#### 4.6.2. Distinguishing aspects

The differences between the HEIs emerge when how the course development and delivery are managed is examined. In each of the three BLASs above (Table 4.3), the subject is different. The course coordinator could be an academic, a professional or a shared role between an academic and a professional. The differences in the type of coordinator are then reflected in the processes that are followed and the role of the TEL unit. With academic-led development there is much less division of labour than when professionally-led, and the division of labour tends to be more horizontal than vertical. The other clear how difference between HEI A and HEI B is the decentralised nature of the support. With HEI A, educational developers, educational technologists and computer technicians are discipline-based, whereas with HEI B, they are centralised. With HEI A, the professional staff are seen by academics as never anything more than support, to the extent that professional staff are more like artefacts than collaborators, in that they are used to mediate the relationship between the subject and the objective, and their knowledge and skills are internalised by the academics.

Contradiction/HEI	A	B	C
Critical Conflicts	Work overload and lack of skill	Insufficient resources and insufficient time	The threat to traditional roles
Double Binds	Academic freedom, collaboration and the right to say no	Working professionally without offending academically	Is collaboration and support compatible?
Tertiary	Maintaining the status quo	Clashing with the older structures	Will collaboration survive or be subsumed
Quaternary	Not acknowledging a change in format	An organisation within an organisation	Insufficient rules

Table 4.4 Contradictions compared

In HEI A and HEI C, participants discussed a time when professional staff would no longer be needed to develop and deliver blended learning courses. Although there was a more collaborative working environment in HEI C, the professional staff were working toward a future situation where the academic



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was again solely responsible for course development and delivery. In HEI B, the professional staff appear to have more clearly defined roles and are seen as collaborators with academic staff. While there is evidence of knowledge transfer between the academics and professional staff in HEI B, professional staff appear to have a more permanent role that makes more of a contribution than simply upskilling the academic staff. In HEI B, the academic and professional roles are seen as equally important to the development and delivery of the blended learning course.

The communities appear to be much smaller and less diverse when the management of the course is more academically-led. Leaning more toward new managerialism, HEI B and C tend to see external national organisations as part of their community. While it was noted above that the rules framework was very similar, the response to that framework is quite different, with HEI A happy to maintain the existing rules framework, and HEI B more inclined to develop their own set of rules parallel to the rest of the organisation. Meanwhile, HEI C appears to be prepared to tackle the job of actually changing the rules framework in acknowledgement of a new reality.

In terms of the contradictions (Table 4.4), the different ways in which the HEIs respond to the primary and secondary contradictions are shown in the different types of tertiary and quaternary contradictions that emerge. With HEI A, maintaining the same type of activity as existed before and being informed by the same rules framework leads to contradictions between the outcome of the older activity system and the object of the BLAS and a rules framework that appears not fit for the object of the BLAS. These contradictions are contrasted with HEI B's conflict with the older activity system and the emergence of an organisation within an organisation. For HEI C, the contradictions revolve not around older and newer systems but in trying to transition the HEI collectively to a newer reality.

While there are similarities and differences between the three HEIs, there does not appear to be sufficient similarity in how the development and delivery

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of the courses are managed to develop a composite case. The lack of a composite case may undermine the applicability of the findings of this study, however, the resulting three separate cases do offer an opportunity to view the research questions from three separate perspectives.

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## Chapter 5 Discussion

This study sought to explore how blended learning courses were managed as activity systems in selected Irish HEIs and to see if such an exploration can contribute to the ongoing discussion about collegiality and new managerialism in the HE sector. What emerged from this study are three different approaches that have been aligned with the three different management styles evident in HE: collegiality, new managerialism and neo collegiality. With three different approaches come three different sets of challenges, from which can be drawn an understanding of the implications for managing blended learning course development and delivery from three different angles. An example of each management approach emerging from the study means that there is also the opportunity to discuss how blended learning course development and delivery informs the collegiality—new managerialism debate from three different perspectives. This chapter will also discuss the value and problems associated with using CHAT and the ASM as analytical frameworks for organisational behaviour in a HE context.

### **5.1 How are blended learning courses managed as ASMs in selected Irish HEIs?**

As stated, three different approaches to the management of blended learning courses emerged from this study. HEI A kept very close to the existing academic and discipline-based structures and processes. It stipulated a preference for blended learning in its policies and established goals for blended learning in its compact with the HEA. In order to achieve those goals, HEI A created a space for blended learning in the hope that academics, driven by market demand, would move into that space and draw on the help that was there to develop and deliver blended learning courses. In doing so, academics were invited to allow themselves to be gently nudged by the academic staff seconded into professional roles into embracing some of the concepts and practices associated with blended learning.

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Alternatively, HEI B appears to have broken with the academic and discipline-based structures and processes and adopted a more new managerialist approach. Blended learning course development and delivery in HEI B is professionally coordinated and uses project management tools and a host of professional and academic staff recruited internally and externally. HEI C took a similar academic-led approach to HEI A but more proactively managed the processes. The policy statements and HEA compact goals for blended learning were explicitly stated by HEI C, and senior management were more deliberate about making blended learning courses happen by taking responsibility to adjust structures, create posts, change rules and drive a collaborative approach from the top. The result was for the professional staff to be much more involved in the development and delivery of blended learning than in HEI A, but for academic staff to retain control. Therefore, there does not appear to be a clear-cut answer to the question how are blended learning courses managed in Irish HEIs? What this study has revealed is that there is the potential for quite different approaches to be adopted that each have their own challenges and benefits.

## **5.2 What are the challenges of managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses as identified as contradictions in the analysis of the three ASMs?**

The challenges involved in each of the three approaches are apparent in the corresponding secondary, tertiary and quaternary contradictions outlined in each of the BLASs above. They are responses to the primary contradiction, seen in the division of labour elements in the BLASs, caused by the drop in the use value of the academic when the decision is made to blend a course. Taking a collegial approach, HEI A compensates for a drop in the use value of the academic with the advent of blended learning by increasing the digital and work capacity of the academic. In doing so, HEI A's approach increases the workload on the academic and the academic coordinator, without making any compensation in terms of changing rules or structures or processes. The additional workload for academics is a concern noted by Gregory and Lodge (2015) who see a lack of alignment between work allocation models for

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academics and the actual work required with technology enhanced learning. In search of sustainable online or blended learning, a number of studies have highlighted the need for some level of organisational change (Garrison and Vaughan, 2012; Marshall, 2012; Stepanyan, Littlejohn & Margaryan, 2013; Taylor and Newton, 2012). HEI A's approach maintains the status quo, however, and avoids the challenge of adjusting its structures, processes or academic-led culture. The risk is that HEI A's approach means that its ability to achieve the objective is then dependent on the goodwill of academic staff. Those teaching on the course and the academic coordinating the course have to be sufficiently motivated to embrace the additional upskilling and workload demands. They have to be willing to take on the extra demands of blended learning without increasing their exchange value. Therefore, the main challenge for HEI A would be how to make the approach sustainable when it is dependent primarily on the goodwill of motivated academic staff willing to take on the extra demands of blended learning courses. This challenge of the overburdened academic did not go unnoticed by participants in HEI A, however, they tended to look to national bodies or the need for national agreements to address the issue rather than look to potential internal organisational change.

For HEI B, the main challenge in adopting a largely new managerial approach is the contrast the approach has with the rest of the HEI. HEI B's BLAS illustrated secondary contradictions between the rules of the organisation and the artefacts and between the cultural norms and the role of the professional coordinator. Together with the tertiary contradictions between the BLAS and the structures and processes that exist for non-blended learning courses, the secondary contradictions would suggest that HEI B's approach to blended learning is akin to an organisation within an organisation functioning largely according to its self-devised set of cultural norms and rules. HEI B could be seen as an example of how HEIs can function as hybrid organisations, (Hedley, 2010; Kolsaker, 2008) where different management approaches exist side-by-side (Alford & Hughes, 2008). The sufficiently non prescriptive nature of the rules for HEI B allow for this organisation within an organisation to exist,

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although the BLAS for HEI B is still restricted by the slow moving inflexible nature of the centralised functional units of the HEI. Adopting this organisation within an organisation approach to blended learning development embraces the potential complexity of blended learning but does so almost separately to the collegially managed rest of the organisation.

For HEI C, the challenge is in taking a collaborative approach to tackle the additional skill and workload required to develop and deliver blended learning but within, and not independent to, the rest of the HEI. The contradictions highlighted within HEI C offer examples of how challenging it can be to adjust the existing structures and relationships in order to accommodate a collaboration between professional and academic staff on blended or e-learning courses given the fears of academic staff (Botterlli, 2013). Such fears were apparent in HEI C, where academic staff resistance to blended learning was reported in participant responses. However, HEI C introduced structural and rule changes, driven with the support of senior management, which accepts the need for change to benefit from the opportunities of collaboratively developed blended learning. The professional staff reported being stuck between being seen as collaborators or support staff, while the fears of academic staff (Hanson, 2009; Goolnik, 2012) of the changes to professional practice and identity that digital educational technology threatened also remain. Nonetheless, HEI C's approach to managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses tends to meet a number of the criteria Elton (1995) outlines as essential for neo-collegiality to succeed, namely, "all academic tasks be in principle equally valued in the eyes of academic and support staff" and "decision-making in general be made by teams and groups involved in particular areas of work and, much less frequently, by individuals acting on their own" (p. 141).

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### **5.3 What possible resolutions and implications for managing blended learning course development and delivery in the future can be concluded?**

Assessing the implications of the findings of this study for future blended learning courses involves re-visiting the debate about the extent to which blended learning course development and delivery should be managed. Seeing the opposing arguments from the second part of the literature review through the findings of this study illustrates that blending a course brings with it additional complexity and time and skill demands that require an increased level of management. However, the arguments in favour of increased levels of management do not necessarily mean discarding the concerns that suggested course development was management averse.

It was argued that courses need to be managed because, among other reasons, they are complex and require collaboration with professional staff. Alternatively, it was argued that courses need to be owned by the academic to ensure they were pedagogically led and the sanctity of independent scholarship was protected. Despite the different approaches revealed in this study, it was acknowledged in each of the three cases that blended learning did introduce the need for additional skill and time demands and was more complex than face-to-face courses. HEI A's approach retained academic control, thereby protecting pedagogy and independent scholarship and rejected the idea of collaboration, preferring to place the additional complexity and time and skill demands on the shoulders of academic staff, although advice and training were provided. In the highly managed BLAS of HEI B, an effort was made to protect pedagogical prominence and independent scholarship by ensuring that the discipline head of department and participating academic had sign off on the academic content and pedagogical aspects of the course. However, with all other issues, the academic may have been consulted, but the decisions lay with the professional course coordinator. In HEI C, the professional coordinator and educational developers appear to be as aware of the need to prioritise the pedagogical issues as the academics, reflecting Graham's (2013) study that revealed that professional staff

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regardless of role or seniority were engaged in supporting student learning outcomes. Moreover, the collaborative nature of the relationship between the professional and academic coordinator and between the educational developer and the academic appeared to allow for a blurring of roles and a collective responsibility for the academic and pedagogical nature of the course to emerge.

The relevant issue for discussion appears to be how far does academic control need to stretch in order to ensure that independent scholarship is protected and pedagogical concerns are addressed? Does an academic have to control all the processes, tasks and decision making around the development and delivery of blended learning courses in order for the course to have academic integrity? The concern is that blended learning, and other forms of online education, industrialise the craft of academic work by introducing technical requirements and standards (Musselin, 2007) that remove the academic from directly impacting the personal learning experience for each student. Taking a new managerial approach to managing blended learning exacerbates that fear. What this study has revealed is that blended learning's need for collaboration and its additional complexity requires a more managerial approach but that there are alternatives to protecting pedagogical concerns and academic integrity, as illustrated by HEI B and HEI C, than ensuring that the academic has ultimate and unquestioned control.

#### **5.4 How do the responses to these contradictions, as seen in changes to HEI practices, structures and staff relationships, inform the debate about new managerialism and collegiality in HE?**

In the prologue, it is stated that supporting the development and delivery of blended learning courses presented an insight into the clash between collegiality and new managerialism in HE. It was assumed at the outset, or more accurately hoped, that research into blended learning course management would reveal a contribution to resolving that clash. As the research progressed, this hope seemed to coalesce around the idea that neo-collegiality might offer the required compromise and that the management of



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blended learning course development and delivery might be the practical manifestation of neo-collegiality. With that in mind, the hope of this research was that it would be possible to devise a composite neo-collegial model from the three cases that would help resolve the new managerial-collegiality clash. No composite model emerged, however, rather what emerged were three different approaches, two of which reinforce the new managerial and collegial approaches respectively and a third that can be aligned with a more neo-collegial approach. The insight for the new managerial—collegiality debate that this research reveals, therefore, is not a ‘solution’ but rather a reminder that context is significant and that different circumstances and requirements demand or lead to different approaches, which may be appropriate for a given space and time, but then may evolve into something quite different as the context and demands change. That said, what the experiences of HEIs A, B and C say about the larger debate between new managerialism and collegiality is that a compromise is possible. The study has shown that a new managerial approach, as adopted by HEI B, tends to sit outside the existing collegial structure of the HEI, at odds with the operations of its central functions and in stark contrast to the activity system for managing non-blended courses. The experience of HEI B shows how a more new managerial approach cannot sufficiently be accommodated within the structures and processes of the rest of the HEI but that, ironically, the collegial approach to management actually facilitates the development of a hybrid organisation with differently managed departments co-existing in parallel. HEI A’s collegial approach shows how it is possible to maintain the status quo in the face of challenges and change brought on by digital educational technology by expecting more of the academic. HEI C’s effort to embrace some of the benefits of a new managerial approach, while retaining the essential qualities of collegiality, illustrate that there is potential for a neo-collegial approach as advocated initially by Elton (1995) and recently re-advocated by Bacon (2014) and Tight (2014).

From the literature review, it emerged that the potential success of a neo-collegial approach rested largely on the shoulders of the middle manager, in

this case the course coordinator. In section 2.2.2.1, reference was made to Whitchurch's (2008) definition of the 'blended professionals' who occupy a space between academic and professional in a HEI. Whitchurch's study looked at administrative and managers in HEIs and categorised professional identities (2008) into four types (Table 5.1).

Categories of identity	Characteristics
<i>Bounded professionals</i>	Work within clear structural boundaries (e.g. function, job description)
<i>Cross-boundary professionals</i>	Actively use boundaries for strategic advantage and institutional capacity building
<i>Unbounded professionals</i>	Disregard boundaries to focus on broadly-based projects and institutional development
<i>Blended professionals</i>	Dedicated appointments spanning professional and academic domains

Table 5.1 Categories of Professional Identity (Whitchurch, 2008, p. 384)

The three approaches outlined in the study also highlighted three different types of course coordinator, which can be mapped on to Whitchurch's categories (2008). The course coordinator in HEI A most closely resembles the bounded professional, who works within clear discipline boundaries and who takes the challenges and opportunities of blended learning courses and adjust them to suit existing roles. The course coordinator in HEI B most closely resembles the unbounded professional, who disregards HEI departmental barriers to assemble a cross discipline, cross skill project team for the life of the project. HEI C's dual course coordinator could be seen as the origins of what will emerge to be a blended professional course coordinator, who is both academic and professionally grounded. What this study suggests for the collegial—new managerial debate is that a collegial approach to blended learning increases the demands on the academic, whereas a new managerial approach leads to a parallel organisation within the HEI, but that a neo-collegial approach is possible. The study also confirms the pivotal role occupied by the middle managers in HEIs in determining the management approach adopted.

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### **5.5 What new understandings of CHAT as a theoretical framework can be garnered from applying the ASM to blended learning course management in HE?**

With regard to the criticisms of the use of CHAT and the ASM highlighted in section 2.3.2.4—that it is too general to be framework and lacks analytical focus, pays insufficient attention to politics and power, utilises a confusing definition of object, and places too much emphasis on the community over the individual—this study can contribute to those areas of discussion. The value of utilising the ASM as an analytical framework was seen in the way in which it allowed a shape to be applied to an ill-defined set of processes and relationships, which facilitated a comparison to take place between commonly defined elements. Not all aspects of the activity were defined, however. While the division of labour element allowed for power relationships to be analysed in terms of vertical and horizontal divisions of labour, the ability to discuss exercising power through politics and the source of that power did not emerge in discussing any of the elements. For example, while it was possible to compare the different artefacts being used in the different approaches, it was not clear how to compare the source of the power exercised by the course coordinators. As well as using the ASM to identify power sources, it would also have been useful to be able to utilise the ASM to identify the impact of exercising legitimate power sanctioned by the HEI versus illegitimate sources of power by individuals.

It was felt that the only way to avoid confusion between the material and motive aspects of the object in an ASM was to revert to Leontiev's dual definition and separate the objekt from the predmet. In doing so, the suggestion from this study is that it is preferable not to attempt to define material and motive with the word object, but rather to distinguish between the material and the motivational object. The three activity systems explored in this study were each viewed from an individual's perspective, even in the case of the HEI C, where the subject was identified as a composite of an academic and professional coordinator, in what could be seen as the germ from which a blended professional coordinator could emerge. In that sense, the

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perspective of the individual, when the individual is the subject, was not consumed by the activity of the collective. The experience of the coordinator was clearly represented. The experiences of the other individuals participating in the activity were subsumed, however. While the views of academics, educational technologists and senior managers were captured in seeking to define the activity system, their experiences were viewed only as they related to the management activity and, therefore, secondary to the collective activity. Taking these drawbacks into consideration, however, the value of using the ASM is being able to put a shape, albeit an incomplete shape, on a difficult-to-define series of processes and relationships from which it is possible to draw comparisons between cases.

The comparison facilitated by using ASMs illustrated that there can be significantly different approaches to managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses. Each of those approaches appears to have its own set of challenges. However, understanding the different approaches and their corresponding challenges is only part of the implications of this study for the future management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses. The other implications highlighted are that the decision to opt for blended learning does bring additional challenges and complexity that requires an additional level of management, but that it is possible to preserve the academic integrity of a course while also having it become more managed. The key to resolving that issue appears to be in establishing where the limits are of academic freedom. The possible compromise between management and management averse informs the collegiality—new managerial debate by illustrating that a neo collegial approach to course management is possible. Moreover, the lack of a compromise can lead to overburdening the academic, as with the collegial approach, or to the growth of an organisation within an organisation, as with the new managerial approach.

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## 5.6 Limitations

In the methodology chapter, the argument was made for selecting cases based on literal replication, with the idea being that a composite case could be derived from looking at three separate but similar cases that would then have some applicable value to the sector as a whole. In the course of the study, however, it became apparent that a composite case could not be constructed given the disparity in approaches discovered. The lack of a composite case reduces the applicability of the findings, given that the differences in the approaches revealed then invites questions about the “uniqueness or artifactual conditions” surrounding the use of a single case (Yin, 2009, p. 61). It should also be noted that the lack of a composite case meant that an initial explorative study morphed into a study that compared different approaches.

In terms of research methods, observation would have added more to the understanding of the ASMs explored by this study. However, observation would have made institutional and participant anonymity almost impossible. It is assumed that anonymity was so important because blended learning is challenging the status quo and, as a result, some of its practitioners feel they may be engaged in activities that their HEIs or their peers could find troubling. Hopefully, future studies in this area can be more open and that the need to protect institution and personal anonymity will not impede methods for data collection.

The results of the pilot study suggested that the key personnel in the development and delivery of blended learning courses were the course-coordinator/professional coordinator, instructional designer/educational developer and academic staff who taught on the course. Students and heads of department were not seen as sufficiently involved in the management of the development of the courses to be invited to participate. However, on reflection, the study’s discussion and findings could have been better informed had representatives of these two cohorts been included.

The semi-structured interviews contained questions on artefacts and the means used to carry out the actions within the activities (Appendix Four). The

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responses to these questions suggest that there was some confusion over what was understood by artefact. Respondents tended to focus on educational technologies used in teaching and learning, where the interviewer sought answers on artefacts used to manage the development and delivery of the courses. The management artefacts tended to be more psychological mediators, as defined by CHAT. In taking the emphasis off educational technologies as artefacts, an opportunity was missed to greater explore the impact of educational technologies on the management of the course. The study discussed whether the impact of educational technology, for example through a multimodal approach to teaching and learning, required a more managed approach to blended learning course development and delivery. However, the extent to which multimodality drives management approaches or even whether technological affordance can determine where a course appears on the collegial—new managerial spectrum was not considered. Failure to fully explore the impact of educational technologies as mediators limits the overall comprehension of the activity systems examined.

### **5.7 Further research**

Looking at the lack of student input to this study, future research could possibly explore the student view of the way blended courses are developed and delivered. It was outside the remit of this study to assess the quality of a blended learning course depending on how the development and delivery was managed. Assessing the quality of the blended learning course from the students' perspective, and asking whether or not quality was connected to where the management of the course sits on the collegial—new managerial spectrum would be a natural next step. Student involvement in the BLASs above was covered in describing the community elements. However, digital technology is facilitating increased student involvement in course development through more direct mechanisms than simply course feedback, for example through the use of student generated teaching content in a multimodal approach to teaching and learning. Further research could explore whether there is a relationship between increased student involvement in the

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management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses and a more or less new managerial approach being adopted.

This study has explored three different approaches to managing blended learning courses, but it did not investigate why certain HEIs have opted for different approaches, which is another potential area for future research. What factors determine when a more collegial approach is more likely to emerge than a new managerial or neo collegial approach? The answer to this question could be illuminated by a more extensive exploration of the impact of adopting educational technologies. To what extent does the selection of educational technology determine whether a course is managed in a more managerial or more collegial manner? This potential future research could possibly involve placing educational technology in the role of the subject in the ASM, thereby suggesting a sociomaterialist approach, whereby the technology takes on the same level of agency as the human. Adopting a sociomaterialist approach would involve resolving the agential realist—critical realist ontological perspectives of sociomaterialism (Leonardi, 2013), however. The former suggests that material and social have a mutually constitutive relationship, and the latter suggests that social and material are separate and become inseparable only through human activity over time (Leonardi, 2013). This study suggests a critical realist perspective is more appropriate because, despite the similarities in motives and structures between the three HEIs, human agency determined three very different approaches. That said, further research on the specific influence of educational technology, informed by sociomaterialism, would add perspective to what this study is suggesting. Having discussed the presentation and analysis of the data from the perspective of the research questions, and noted the limitations of the study, which can inform possible directions of future study, it is possible to highlight some key findings of the study.

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## Chapter 6 Conclusion

### 6.1 Key findings and significance of the study

The motivation behind embarking on this study was to discover if the experience of managing blended learning courses could contribute to a better understanding of the changing management culture in higher education. In the prologue, a reference was made to an inability to articulate what it was about blended learning that was exposing the issues around an apparent management culture clash. Through CHAT, and specifically the use of ASMs, this study has revealed a primary contradiction at the source of blended learning course development and delivery. The first key finding of this study is therefore that:

- CHAT is an appropriate analytical framework for exploring course management in HEIs and highlighting challenges for managers identified as contradictions within the ASMs.

CHAT and ASMs are appropriate because they offer a mechanism to sufficiently explore the activity, but possibly more valuable is the use of the framework to expose the primary contradiction behind the activity system.

This leads to the second key finding of the study, which is that:

- The approaches to managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses explored were separate responses to the primary contradiction of a reduction in the use value of academics compared to their exchange value that occurred as a result of making courses blended.

It would appear that, in formulating a response to this primary contradiction, HEIs are knowingly or unknowingly drawing on the attributes of new managerialism, collegiality and neo collegiality, which explains why blended learning course development and delivery is helping to expose the issues around this management culture clash. The exploration of the three cases in



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the study revealed that there were three different responses to the imbalance in the exchange and use value of academics. Each different response had different characteristics which required a mechanism to sufficiently compare them—a blended learning management typology. Applying that typology to the three cases explored leads to the next key finding of the study that:

- The three management approaches to developing and delivering blended learning revealed in the study can be aligned to the management approaches of collegiality, new managerialism and neo-collegiality

The fourth key finding is aimed at future practitioners of managing blended learning courses.

- Collegial, new managerial or neo collegial approaches to managing blended learning course development and delivery bring their own set of challenges for a HEI

None of the three approaches were problem free. They each brought their own set of secondary, tertiary and quaternary contradictions. As a result, this study has indicated for future practitioners the value of assessing whether they are taking a collegial, new managerial or neo collegial approach and, if so, what specific challenges they should be aware of.

This study has contributed to the ongoing discussions on professional identity in HEIs by revealing that the activity of developing and delivering a blended learning course blurs the boundaries between professional and academic staff. Even in the collegial, academic-led example of HEI A, where professional staff were seen by academics as having a supporting role, there was a recognition of the importance of professional staff, even if that was seen only in the way academic staff were seconded into professional roles in HEI A. In HEI B and HEI C, the professional and academic staff appeared to have an almost equal status, which is why the final key finding is that:

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- Developing and delivering a blended learning environment is a shared experience for professional and academic HEI staff.

These key findings contribute to an understanding of how managing the development and delivery of blended learning courses within the context of clashing management cultures is impacting on the way HEIs in Ireland operate. The study identifies that a decision to opt for a blended course can lead to a drop in use value of the academic. It has shown that, with the use of a blended learning management typology, it is possible to map how HEIs respond to the drop in use value to a collegial, new managerial or neo collegial management approach. The study has also illustrated how each different approach leads to its own set of challenges. Finally, the study has contributed to an understanding of the impact of developing and delivering blended learning on the relationships between academic and professional staff in HEIs in Ireland, within the context of the emergence of the third-space professional.

## **6.2 Reflections on the literature review**

### **6.2.1 Commonalities**

The dominant narratives that emerged from the first part of the literature review on HEI management were the idea that the collegiality—new managerialism debate was all-encompassing for HE, that there was a compromise to this apparent dichotomy and that the role of the middle manager was key to achieving this compromise. In reflecting on what emerged from this study, the issues on either side of the collegiality—new managerialism debate were clearly apparent in the study's three ASMs—market forces, accountability, systematic processes, project management versus, pedagogical priorities, academic freedom and iterative development. Efforts to bridge that dichotomy were also evident in all three of the cases, to varying degrees. Moreover, the role of the middle manager, in the form of the academic or professional coordinator was very much key, not just to a

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compromise between collegiality and new managerialism, but to all aspects of the development and delivery of courses.

With the second part of the literature review—the management of the development and delivery of blended learning courses—the dominant narratives were that there are a number of models to guide blended learning development and delivery and case studies of implementation, which revealed contradictory approaches. From these contradictory approaches it was possible to define a set of criteria that could be used to view the development of blended learning courses through the lens of the collegiality—new managerialism debate. The contradictory approaches apparent in the literature were reflected in the cases examined for this study, where contrasting approaches prevented the emergence of a composite model for the development and delivery of blended learning courses. The study also showed that the typology that emerged from the literature review could be applied to the cases and help define the outcomes of each of the ASMs.

The dominant narrative in the third part of the literature review was activity theory and specifically the use of ASMs as applicable mechanisms to assessing organisational behavior in a HE context. However, another narrative that emerged was that activity theory did have its limitations and that there were contestable aspects to its value as a mechanism for assessing organisational behavior in HE. As discussed in 5.5, the study revealed the value of activity theory and the ASM as a way to represent complicated processes and relationships in a difficult to define changing context. Similarly, the criticisms and contested definitions highlighted in the literature review were apparent when attempting to apply the ASM to the three cases.

### 6.2.2 Differences

The key difference or anomaly with the study is the role of the middle manager, which emerged from the literature review as being of considerable importance in finding the bridge between a collegial and new managerial management approach. In the literature review, the middle manager was the

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head of a discipline-based academic department or faculty. In each of the three cases covered in the study this middle manager of influence was the course coordinator. The importance of the course co-ordinator over the head of department in defining how a course is managed emerged during the pilot and was confirmed by each of the three cases, where the head of department appeared to have a supportive rather than defining role.

Another anomaly to emerge from the study is the idea that any transition to a more collaborative professional/academic development environment to accommodate blended learning will be temporary. In the literature review, a contrast emerged between authors who promoted a more collaborative work environment for blended learning and those who did not. What the study suggests is that the collaboration that emerged in HEI B and HEI C was likely temporary and that there would eventually be a return to a development environment where an academic works individually on their own teaching content with little or no involvement from non-discipline colleagues.

### **6.3 Implications for practitioners**

The value of this study for practitioners is that it provides a mechanism to discuss the management of blended learning courses. The study acknowledges that the facilitation of a more flexible learning environment afforded by digital technology can challenge existing structures, processes and working relationships in HE. It also traces all of those challenges back to the core critical conflict that the advent of digital technology reduces the use value of the academic. By placing those challenges in the context of the collegiality—new managerialist debate and by utilising the practical aspects of the ASM, the study presents practitioners with the tools to assess the management of their blended learning courses against a new managerial-collegial—neocollegial spectrum. Having positioned the management of their courses on the spectrum, practitioners can also use this study to then consider the implications of how their blended learning courses are being managed for the organisation and staff and, therefore, make informed decisions about the management of the development and delivery of their

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courses because the study offers an appreciation of what those decisions could mean for the organisation's structures, processes and staff dynamics. Through applying the ASM, the study also illustrates the extent to which moving to blended learning can impact so many varied aspects of the HEI and cannot be simply localised in a department. The implications of this finding for practitioners is in how it highlights all the aspects that need to be taken into consideration when transitioning to blended learning from the community to the organisation's rules to the processes to the staff and management roles. The complexity involved is a reminder that, while the value of iterative development of ideas and concepts should not be overshadowed, course development and delivery is required to be a managed endeavour.

#### **6.4 Final Comments**

In the prologue, the motivation (or predmet) behind embarking on this study was defined as a personal need to discover why it felt like blended learning was exposing elements of an apparent management culture clash in HE. That need has been satisfied, to an extent, by the understanding that the introduction of digital educational technology, through such adventures as blended learning, has reduced the use value of the academic in HE. Moreover, the reason why blended learning has exposed the management culture clash is that, in trying to respond to that drop in use value, HEIs are clutching at whatever management straws make sense as they try and piece together the long-term effects of reducing the use value of the academic, while the exchange value remains unchanged. To that end, the study has satisfied its motivation, but this is only a small contribution to gaining a better understanding of the post—digital technology HE sector.

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\*Please note that citations and references to HEI official documentation has been removed in order to protect institute anonymity.



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## Appendix One: Articles on Blended Learning Models and Case Studies

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Title	Year	Type	Rationale	Driven	Organised	Process	Led	Staff Dynamic
Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., & Francis, R. (2006). Implementing a university e-learning strategy: levers for change within academic schools. <i>ALT-J, Research in Learning Technology</i> , 14(2), 135–151. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v14i2.10952201-218">https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v14i2.10952201-218</a> .	2005	Case	Improve learning experience	Top-Down	Compromise	Systematic	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Davis, H. C., & Fill, K. (2007). Embedding blended learning in a university's teaching culture: Experiences and reflections. <i>British Journal of Educational Technology</i> , 38(5), 817–828. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00756.x">https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00756.x</a>	2007	Case	Improve teaching methods	Bottom Up	Distributed	Compromise	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Roberts, C. (2008). Implementing Educational Technology in Higher Education: A Strategic Approach. <i>Journal of Educators Online</i> , 5(1), 1–16. Retrieved from <a href="http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ904044">http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ904044</a>	2008	Model	Increase Numbers	Top-Down	Distributed	Systematic	Lecturer	Group of academics

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Normand, C., Littlejohn, A., & Falconer, I. (2008). A model for effective implementation of flexible programme delivery. <i>Innovations in Education and Teaching International</i> , 45(1), 25–36. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290701757351">https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290701757351</a>	2008 Model	Increase student numbers	Bottom Up	Distributed	Compromise	Lecturer	Individual academic
Nichols, M. (2008). Institutional perspectives: The challenges of e-learning diffusion. <i>British Journal of Educational Technology</i> , 39(4), 598–609. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00761.x">https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00761.x</a>	2008 Model	None	Top-Down	Distributed	Systematic	Lecturer	Group of academics
Picciano, A. G. (2009). Blending with purpose: The multimodal model. <i>Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks</i> , 13(1), 7–18. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.rcetj.org/index.php/rcetj/article/view/11/14">http://www.rcetj.org/index.php/rcetj/article/view/11/14</a>	2009 Model	Improve teaching methods	Bottom Up	Distributed	Iterative	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Abdous, M. (2009). E-learning quality assurance : a process-oriented lifecycle model, 17(3), 281–295. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880910970678">https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880910970678</a>	2009 Model	None	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic	Administrator	Collaborative

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<p>Chao, I. T., Saj, T., &amp; Hamilton, D. (2010). Using collaborative course development to achieve online course quality standards. <i>The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning</i>, 11(3), 106–126. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/912">http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/912</a></p>	2010	Cases	Improve learning experience	Top-Down	Distributed	Systematic	Combination	Collaborative
<p>Taylor, J. a., &amp; Newton, D. (2012). Beyond blended learning: A case study of institutional change at an Australian regional university. <i>Internet and Higher Education</i>, 18, 54–60. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.10.003">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.10.003</a></p>	2012	Case	Improve learning experience	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic	Lecturer	Academics with Support
<p>Bohle Carbonell, K., Dailey-Hebert, A., &amp; Gijsselaers, W. (2012). Unleashing the creative potential of faculty to create blended learning. <i>Internet and Higher Education</i>, 18, 29–37. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.10.004">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.10.004</a></p>	2012	Case	Improve learning experience	Bottom Up	Distributed	Iterative	Combination	Collaboration
<p>Garrison, D. R., &amp; Vaughan, N. D. (2012). Institutional change and leadership associated with blended learning innovation: Two case studies. <i>Internet and Higher Education</i>, 18, 24–28. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.09.001">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.09.001</a></p>	2012	Case	Improve teaching methods	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic	Manager	Academics with Support

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Korr, J., Derwin, E. B., Greene, K., & Sokoloff, W. (2012). Transitioning an Adult-Serving University to a Blended Learning Model. <i>The Journal of Continuing Higher Education</i> , 60(1), 2–11. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2012.649123">https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2012.649123</a>	2012	Case	Improve teaching methods	Top-Down	Compromise	Systematic	Administrator	Collaboration
Quinn, D., Amer, Y., Lonie, A., Blackmore, K., Thompson, L., & Pettigrove, M. (2012). Leading change: Applying change management approaches to engage students in blended learning. <i>Australasian Journal of Educational Technology</i> , 28(1), 16–29.	2012	Case	Increase student numbers	Compromise	Distributed	Systematic	Lecturer	Collaborative
Goolnik, G. (2012). Change Management Strategies When Undertaking eLearning Initiatives in Higher Education. <i>Journal of Organizational Learning and Leadership</i> , 10(2), 16–28. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.leadingtoday.org/weleadinlearning/Winter2012/Article%20-%20Goolnik.pdf">http://www.leadingtoday.org/weleadinlearning/Winter2012/Article 2 - Goolnik.pdf</a>	2012	Model	More efficient operation	Compromise	Distributed	Compromise	Manager	Academics with Support
Gedik, N., Kiraz, E., & Yassar Ozden, M. (2013). Design of a blended learning environment: Considerations and implementation issues. <i>Australasian Journal of Educational Technology</i> , 29(1), 1–19. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1234/ajet.v29i1.6">https://doi.org/10.1234/ajet.v29i1.6</a>	2013	Case	Improve learning experience	Bottom Up	Distributed	Systematic	Lecturer	Group of academics

Alammary, A., Sheard, J., & Carbone, A. (2014). Blended learning in higher education: Three different design approaches. <i>Australasian Journal of Educational Technology</i> , 30(4), 440–454. <a href="https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.v30i4.693">https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.v30i4.693</a>	2014 Model	Improve teaching methods	Bottom Up	Distributed	Iterative	Lecturer	Individual
Shaw, T., Barnet, S., Mcgregor, D., & Avery, J. (2015). Using the Knowledge, Process, Practice (KPP) model for driving the design and development of online postgraduate medical education. <i>Medical Teacher</i> , 37(1), 53–8. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2014.923563">https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2014.923563</a>	2015 Model	Improve learning experience	Bottom Up	Compromise	Systematic	Lecturer	Academics with Support
Bocconi, S., & Trentin, G. (2015). Modelling blended solutions for higher education: teaching, learning, and assessment in the network and mobile technology era. <i>Educational Research and Evaluation</i> , 20(7–8), 516–535. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2014.996367">https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2014.996367</a>	2015 Model	Multiple	Bottom Up	Distributed	Systematic	Lecturer	Individual
Mirriahi, N., Alonzo, D., McIntyre, S., Kligyte, G., & Fox, B. (2015). Blended Learning Innovations: Leadership and Change in One Australian Institution. <i>International Journal of Education and Development Using</i>	2015 Case	Student Demands	Top-Down	Centralised	Systematic	Manager	Group of academics

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Information and Communication Technology,  
11(1), 4–16.

Lightner, C. a., & Lightner-Laws, C. a.  
(2016). A blended model: simultaneously  
teaching a quantitative course traditionally,  
online, and remotely. *Interactive Learning  
Environments*, 0(0), 1–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2013.8412>

62

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2016 Model

Increase  
Numbers

Bottom Up

Distributed

Systematic

Lecturer

Group of  
academics

## Appendix Two: Explanation of the Attributes and Elements of the Blended Learning Management Typology

Attribute/element	Explanation
<b>Rationale</b>	The primary reason behind taking a blended approach
Efficiencies	Blended Learning allows for more efficient operation
Improve Learning Experience	Blended learning will offer a more fruitful & rewarding learning experience
Improve Teaching Methods	Blended learning will allow for improved teaching and assessment strategies
Increase student numbers	Blended learning will allow HEIs to recruit more students
Multiple	The authors offer 6 possible rationales for blended learning
None	Not possible to identify the rationale
Student Demands	Blended learning is a response to what students want from HEIs
<b>Driven</b>	From where in the HEI does the drive to develop Blended learning courses come from
Bottom-up	The drive comes from lecturers
Top-down	The drive comes from senior management
Compromise	The drive is coming from both lecturers and senior management
<b>Organised</b>	How blended learning course development is organised within a HEI
Centralised	Organised by a an institute-wide entity
Distributed	Organised on a school, faculty, department basis
Compromise	Organised centrally but with considerable control given over to the faculties

<b>Process</b>	How the blended learning courses were put together
Systematic	Planned, organised, step-by-step process of development and delivery
Iterative	Allowing development and delivery to emerge from repeated cycles of effort
Compromise	Some planning, but with space to all ideas to emerge iteratively
<b>Led</b>	Which role in the HEI took responsibility to lead the development and delivery of the course
Administrator	A professional member of staff but not a manager
Combination	Leadership shared between a lecturer and an administrator
Lecturer	An academic member of staff
Manager	A manager
<b>Staff Dynamic</b>	The relationship between the staff who work on the development and delivery of the course
Academics with support	Academics develop and deliver the course, choosing to bring in professional staff to assist them
Collaboration	Course development and delivery is a shared experience between academic and professional staff
Group of Academics	Course development and delivery is shared between a group of academics only
Individual	An academic develops and delivers the course



## Appendix Three: Ethics Documents

Department of Educational Research  
 County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD,  
 UK  
 Tel: +44 (0) 1524 592685



### Consent Form

**Title: Exploring the challenges of managing blended learning courses in selected Irish higher education institutes (HEIs): An activity theory study.**

		Please Tick
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet relating to the study named above. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2	I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. If I wish to withdraw I am free to do so without providing any reason.	
3	I understand that my interview will be part of data collected for this study and my anonymity will be ensured.	
4	I give consent for all my contributions during the interview to be anonymised and included and/or quoted in this study.	
5	I consent to the interview being audio recorded.	
6	I understand that should I withdraw from the study within six weeks of being interviewed then all data relating to and collected from me will be destroyed and not used in this study. I understand that I can withdraw after this time but data may still be used as it may already have been anonymised and/or analysed.	
7	I understand that the information I provide may be used in a PhD thesis, academic publications and conference presentations.	
8	I agree to take part in the above study.	
<p><b>Name of Participant:</b></p> <p>Signature:</p> <p>Date:</p> <p><b>Name of Researcher:</b></p> <p>Signature:</p> <p>Date:</p>		

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## Participant Information Sheet

### ***Title: Exploring the challenges of managing blended learning courses in selected Irish higher education institutes (HEIs): An activity theory study.***

I am a PhD student in the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University and I am an employee of the Institute of Technology, Tralee. I would like to invite you to take part in a study as part of my PhD research. Before you decide if you wish to take part you need to understand why the study is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

#### **The purpose of the study**

My research aims to explore the management practices behind developing and delivering Blended Learning courses - courses that combine online and face-to-face learning environments for students. I hope to explore the challenges involved in these processes and the extent to which they contrast with existing processes for developing and delivering face-to-face courses.

#### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited because your involvement in the development or support of Blended Learning courses means that you may have an insight into the processes that are involved in developing and delivering such courses. You may also have an insight into the way that these processes differ, or not, from the processes that go into developing a face-to-face course.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

No, your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, please let me know. Your position in your institution will not be affected by your participation, or not, in this study. You can withdraw at any time during the study and there is no penalty for withdrawing. If you withdraw within six weeks of being interviewed then all data relating to and collected from you will be destroyed and not used in this study. You can withdraw after this time but your data may still be used as it may already have been anonymised and/or analysed.

#### **What would taking part involve for me?**

Participation involves being interviewed by me on your role in Blended Learning courses and your understanding of the benefits, pluses, issues and problems with developing and delivering such courses. Interviews will also cover your impression of how Blended Learning courses fit, or not, alongside other face-to-face courses.

Interviews will take around an hour and will take place face-to-face on campus in an office or study room. If you agree, interviews may be conducted via telephone or using Skype. With your permission, interviews will be recorded and transcribed by

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me. If you do not wish to be recorded, please let me know and I will take notes of the interview instead.

**What are the benefits and risks of participation?**

The benefits include having an opportunity to reflect on the role of Blended Learning courses in your institute and the positives and negatives of how they are being managed. Efforts to protect your data and identity (see below) will minimise risks to you. The practicalities of the interview will be agreed with you beforehand and will take into consideration any concerns you have with being identified as a participant in this study.

**What will happen to my data?**

Data here means my notes that may be taken during the interview to remind me of potential questions to ask or observations/thoughts that I occur to me during the interview, audio recordings and any email exchanges we may have had. Data will be kept for a minimum of 10 years after the successful completion of my PhD viva as per Lancaster University policy. Audio recordings will be transferred from the recorder as soon as possible after the interview and stored on my personal encrypted and password protected laptop. They will be deleted from the portable recorder on the day of the interview. Any paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, in my home office. Data will only be accessible to and by me.

Your data will have full protection under the Data Protection Act 1998. The completion of this study is estimated to be December 2016, with data collection complete by April 2016.

**How will my data be used and how will my identity be protected?**

Data may be used in reporting the study in my thesis, academic papers or conference presentations. If your data is used, it will not identify you.

A pseudonym will be given to protect your identity in my PhD thesis, other publications or presentations. Any identifying information about you and your organisation will not be included. All pseudonyms will be securely stored and kept on my encrypted and password protected personal laptop.

**Who to contact for further information**

If you would like more information about this study please contact me, the researcher:

Tony Murphy, Department of Educational Research, County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, [t.murphy1@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:t.murphy1@lancaster.ac.uk).

Or my PhD supervisor:

Dr Natasa Lackovic, Department of Educational Research, County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK, [n.lackovic@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:n.lackovic@lancaster.ac.uk), +44 (0)1524 594662.

**Who to contact with any concerns**

If you would like further information on this study, the programme within which it is being conducted or you have any concerns about the study, your participation in it, or my conduct as a researcher, please contact:

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Professor Paul Ashwin, Head of the Department of Educational Research, D32  
County South, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK, +44 (0)1524 594443,  
[P.Ashwin@Lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:P.Ashwin@Lancaster.ac.uk). HYPERLINK "mailto:P.Ashwin@Lancaster.ac.uk"

This project has been reviewed and approved by members of Lancaster University  
Research Ethics Committee.

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## Appendix Four: Interview Questions

1. Why is the HEI developing Blended Learning Courses? (Object)
2. Who is involved in carrying out the development and delivery of blended learning courses? (Subjects)
3. By what means (artefacts) are the subjects carrying out the development and delivery of blended learning courses?
4. Who is responsible for what, when carrying out this develop and delivery of blended learning courses and how are the roles organised? (Division of Labour)
5. Are there any cultural norms rules or regulations governing the performance of this develop and delivery of blended learning courses? (Rules)
6. What is the environment in which this develop and delivery of blended learning courses is carried out? (Community)
7. What is the desired outcome of the development and delivery of blended learning courses?
8. How do the artefacts adopted help the HEI achieve its objective.
9. How do the rule affect HEI ability to achieve the objective
10. How does the allocation of tasks help the HEI achieve its objective
11. How does the organisation affect the HEI's ability to achieve the objective
12. How do the rules impact on the allocation of tasks
13. How does the artefacts adopted affect how tasks are allocated
14. What impact does the organisational structure/culture have on the way tasks are allocated