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Departmental Dynamics – Examining how best to develop academic careers.

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Conference Track – Human Resources

This research intends to both build upon the available resources as well as examine their effects within higher education (HE). It has been well documented that universities are currently institutions in the public sector that have been subjected to massive shifts in funding, performance measures and indeed deteriorating academic autonomy (Bolden *et al*, 2012). These have inevitably affected staff morale as well as opportunities for career development. Examining the dynamics of the department provide a poignant context for the drivers of this research and its intended outcomes.

Through the review of toolkit resources afforded by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), the study intends to examine areas of best practice in HR and indicate areas where developments could be made within the context of academic career development in HE.

Academic Leadership and Management

Previous studies have utilized literature and current discourse to examine how HR practices, environmental forces and the changing demands of universities affect the performance of leadership and departmental management (Wallace *et al*, 2011; Deem, 2011; Brewer and Brewer, 2010; Kok *et al*, 2010). While these have provided a valid overview and framework for the advancement of human resources, there is room for the examination of human resources (HR) within the context of the workplace environment and what enables development. Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) for example highlight the growth of administrative lines of focus and the proliferation of managerial ideologies in universities with increasing focus on corporately orientated positions such as goal achievement. This can be difficult to console as the movement is at odds with traditional approaches in the management of academics, where academic autonomy and growth is fostered through research excellence. Instead the current crux of management styles is ensuring skillful management of people alongside effective usage and costing of resources balanced against academic drivers. The approaches to pure private sector management differ in the public sector (see table 1 below).

Table 1 Values differences between public service orientation model of management and genetic private sector model

Private sector model	Public sector model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual choice in the market - Demand and price - Closure for private action - The equity of the market - The search for market satisfaction - Customer sovereignty - Competition as the instrument of the market - 'Exit' as the stimulus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collective choice in the polity - Need for resources - Openness for public action - The equity of need - The search for justice - Citizenship - Collective action as the instrument of the polity - Voice as the condition
Source: Adapted from Stewart and Ranson, 1988, p 15 (taken from Pollitt, 1990: p155)	

Likewise the changing environment within which HE operates is open to constant flux, where students are increasingly viewed as customers and education is a commodity (Jarvis, 2001). Likewise changing stakeholder demands and political shifts have added further complexity that academic leaders need to be aware of. The incorporation of management approaches, previously met with cynicism (Jones, 2001; Ackroyd *et al*, 2007) are elements that are increasingly accepted into the manager-academic role in HE.

Is there still a need for academic autonomy and flexibility or has the changing demands influenced the modern drivers of academic careers? Pollitt (1996: p86) very early on had highlighted that “market or market-like solutions to public administration” can reach a stage where they seem automatic or “ritualistic” reducing distinctiveness and moving towards more generic techniques.

Nonetheless ‘manager-academics’ may need to be more effective in the management of funds and administration of university activities, partly as a product of increasing benchmarking and accountability to the public purse (Deem and Brehony, 2005). As an academic, are roles and career paths now split between teaching, research or managerial roles? The quandary and difficulty lies in trying to manage within the current context of performance indicators such as quantitative computations of student numbers, retention, volume of research disseminated and overall student satisfaction. Moreover, is the ‘business’ of HE calling for less archetypal academic careers and instead moving towards more private and corporate techniques?

Methodology

The research intends to meet its aims and objectives through applying a quantitative methodological approach. Utilizing models of best practice and toolkit resources made available to the sector by HEFCE and the LFHE, the research intends to develop a quantitative survey instrument in the data collection process. The questionnaire will predominantly review different issues related to academic management and the working dynamics. It incorporates both sector reports and toolkit documentation in the design of the survey instrument. Similarly the study would seek to provide indicate areas where improvement could be made.

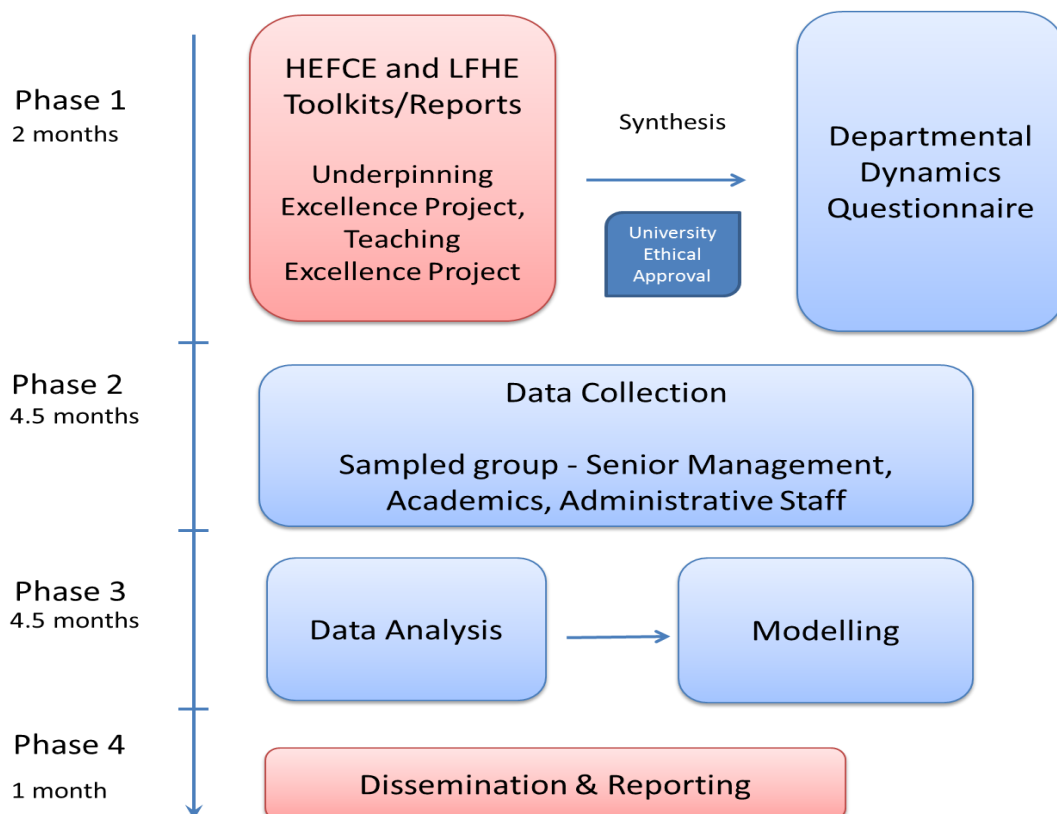
Thus the research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Examine the context of leadership and departmental forces
- Identify key areas of best practice and areas for improvement
- Develop indicative models to enrich staff development.

The ability to test and identify key areas of concern and best practice alongside the review of associations and linkages in the data set is one of the key reasons why quantitative methodologies were considered for this study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Moreover given the objectives of the project, it is envisaged that questionnaire surveys would provide expedited data collection that would still remain robust and accurate. It is envisioned that the data collection and analysis would be undertaken within 12 months (see figure 1 below).

This approach would also reveal key linkages in the dataset, potentially indicating models of best practice in leadership, departmental approaches and avenues for career development.

Figure 1 – Methodology Map



Sampling and Analysis

For the purposes of this study, a purposive sampling approach will be utilized. While a random sampling approach would provide more unbiased data, the study intends to review the different opinions of members of staff at different levels of the organization. Thus, the purposive approach where respondents are selected as ‘critical cases’, would therefore add value and credence to the key aims of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Bryman 2012). It is envisaged that the following job roles/critical cases will be targeted:

- Senior University Management
- Academic Staff
- Administrative Staff

Two institutions have provided access for the purposes of data collection. The names of institutions where the data collection process will be undertaken have been removed for anonymity. It is envisioned that a sample of respondents will be drawn from these institutions utilising the criteria set above.

It is also pertinent that data triangulation is achieved to ensure more accurate and robust data analysis and results that reflect the data collected. The correlation of these issues and staff groups could highlight pertinent areas for consideration or reflection.

Projected Outcomes

1. Indicative Models to aid in best practice

The models would seek to provide a useful guide on departmental dynamics and leadership approaches. Given the increased scrutiny of universities, the models may posit key areas of development and growth potential.

Through the models there is an opportunity to improve best practice by examining different approaches to leadership and departmental management. It is hoped that areas for improvement could be identified alongside the dissemination of areas of best practice. This could then be shared across departments and academic schools.

2. Examination of toolkits and current resources.

Toolkits, resources and facilitation reports have been afforded to the sector. The study is keen to examine the effect and context of these reports on a more specified and localized basis, focusing on staff development and department dynamics.

Development at Conference

The study is in its early stages, thus any feedback and comments would be greatly appreciated. There is a desire to narrow further or identify specific toolkits/resources that will add value to the study and the sector rather than selecting a large volume. Discussions within this context would be particularly useful. Further development and refining of potential toolkits for the research will be undertaken in the led up to the conference.

Discussions on any envisioned pitfalls and limitations to the methodological approach would also be further beneficial.

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