Working the metricized academy: a longitudinal study of outcomes-based performance management at Newcastle University, England.

Outline

Many universities across the world are undergoing significant changes in managerial culture as senior managers orientate themselves to neoliberal policy environments. These are marked by the imperatives to generate income through research-indexed central funding, research grants, and student fees, and to position themselves favourably in a range of national and international league tables. University managers and some branches of management science present this shift to outcomes-based performance management (OBPM) as a value-neutral unavoidable necessity that can be implemented without changing the nature and purpose of scholarship and teaching by supporting staff to reach their full potential through raising and resourcing ambition. In contrast, the emerging critical scholarship suggests that OBPM is a coercive form of governance to discipline employees and fundamentally reconstitute the sense of what intellectual labour is. This literature argues that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that OBPM works in its own terms, but nonetheless it produces a whole range of unintended perverse consequences for the institution and for individual academics. As Newcastle accelerates its own journey down this pathway of "governance by targets and measured performance indicators" (Bevan and Jones, 518) through the so-called 'Raising-The-Bar' (RTB) agenda launched in the summer of 2015, this proposal outlines an extensive, mutli-disciplinary, longitudinal study of this particular case which offers a major contribution to our understanding of these processes and debates more generally.

This outline is provisional and comments and suggestions from colleagues across the university are welcome.

Outcomes-based performance management in the public sector

Neoliberalism is a contested term, but I use it as a shorthand for particular form of reasoning in late capitalist economies that configures increasing spheres of existence in economic terms. In the public sector, this move has been characterized by techniques of 'New Public Management' (NPM) (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011), in particular 'Outcomes-based Performance Management '(OBPM), define by Lowe and Wilson as 'an umbrella term for using 'outcomes' as a way of making a judgment about the performance and effectiveness of social policy interventions' (Lowe and Wilson, 2015). OBPM describes the increased use of a range of metrics to measure the performance of social interventions and reward or punish employees and units in accordance with the success or failure they have in meeting them: its large-scale introduction into UK pubic services has been described by Bevan and Hood as a combination of 'targets' and 'terror' (Bevan and Hood 2006).

Numerous studies have claimed that public sector OBPM is flawed. Van Thiel and Leeuw identify what they call 'the performance paradox' – extensive unintended consequences that not only invalidate conclusions drawn from data, but also negatively affect the performance of the services it was meant to reform (Van Thiel and Leeuw 2002). Van Thiel and Leeuw conclude by

suggesting that better understanding of the psychology of organisational behaviour may 'help to truly achieve the projected advantages of performance indicators in the public domain' (ibid: 278). But other studies are not so sanguine. In an influential study of the introduction of OBPM in Californian welfare provision, Soss et al show how OBPM produces extensive perverse outcomes. It focusses staff time on the production of data rather than stated aims of the OBPM reforms; it encourages the employment and promotion of people with data-processing rather than subject-specific skills; it compels managers to find ways to meet performance targets which are not based on delivering core service, and it encourages staff at all levels to behave perversely in subverting the stated aims of the programme as providing acceptable data becomes their primary task (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). They conclude by arguing that NPM believes it can 'have its cake and eat it': for example, competition and collaboration between employees, centralized control of outcomes and local autonomy. 'It sounds too good to be true, and it is. Reformers would be better served by an open acknowledgement that features of the NPM lie in tension with one another and tend to work at cross purposes,' they conclude (ibid., i217).

However, Soss *et al* argue more than that OBPM is inherently flawed conceptually and productive of unintended perverse consequences. They also argue, following Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power in forming subjectivities (Foucault 1980), that OBPM nonetheless acts to 'discipline thought and behavior' in the organisations providing services (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). It shapes consciousness and changes the ways in which people understand their jobs, but does this in contradictory ways. Thus managers find themselves having to implement changes they do not agree with, and thus try to resist in various ways. Soss et al find that this 'is a subversion that comes at a substantial personal cost. Case managers in this group report that they are exhausted, burnt out, and disappointed that their job is so often about protecting clients from the program itself,' suffering from massively increased stress levels since the introduction of OBPM.

Some authorities endorse goal-setting as a tested method of improving performance in business (Bauer and Erdogan n.d.). Boyne, based on large scale econometric analysis of performance management in the public sector, concludes that the evidence suggests that this form of performance management works in the public sector too (Boyne 2010). However, the work of Soss *et al*, and numerous similar qualitative studies, show that OBPM in public services entails serious measurement problems and turns the delivery of social interventions into a game that has perverse outcomes that are often contradictory to the stated aims of the programmes, as it produces negative unintended consequences and staff stress and unhappiness.

Some scholars, whilst recognizing the problems implicit with OBPM, nonetheless argue that it could be reformed. Pollitt argues that although it is very hard in practice to get it working right, and although it can be counterproductive, targets-based performance management can be useful if ways could be found to implement it with careful attention to local context (Pollitt 2013). Similarly, Bevan argues that OBPM, as evidenced in two major modern examples of state enterprise production targets in the USSR and public service management in England since Tony Blair, is based on two 'heroic assumptions,' that the goal can be measured accurately as standing in for the overall quality of the whole, and that there is minimal 'gaming' of the system leading to negative consequences. These, argues Bevan, simply don't hold up and give rise 'to numerous conceptual and operational difficulties when put into practice' – as PCTs illustrate (Bevan 2006). Nonetheless, he

argues, 'these difficulties do not justify abandoning a target regime' (ibid, 75). As an example, he looks at the Blair government's headline targets of a patient being seen within 4 hours of entering an Accident and Emergency unit, or placed in a hospital bed within 12 hours of a serious diagnosis. Kelman and Friedman, in their study of the data, conclude that this target-setting improved waiting times with no observable negative effects (Kelman and Friedman 2009). Bevan and Jones, however, refute this, on the basis of the two key assumptions of OBPM. Firstly, they found that significant problems with the measurement assumption, with 'discrepancies between officially reported levels of performance and independent surveys of patients' leading to serious questions of the robustness of data (Bevan and Hood 2006). Secondly, they found significant evidence of 'gaming': drafting in of extra staff and cancelling operations scheduled for the period over which performance was measured; making patients wait in ambulance queues until managers were sure they could be seen within 4 hours of admittance; redesignating trolleys as 'beds' by placing them in hallways, etc (ibid, 531-2). Although concluding that there is enough evidence to suggest that OBPM's key assumptions are not justified (ibid, 533), they are still reluctant to dismiss it entirely as perhaps it may be possible to make it work better if it is properly understood (ibid, 535).

We thus have a body of (often quantitative) literature within management studies which suggests such interventions can be effective, and a body of often qualitative studies which suggests it is not. How can these two bodies of literature be reconciled?

This precise question is considered by Lowe and Wilson in their meta-analysis of the literature on NPM/OBPM. They argue that 'the evidence which demonstrates that targets improve performance data and the evidence which suggests OBPM undermines effective practice are both valid,' and that 'they can be brought together in a single explanatory narrative by understanding the theoretical assumptions which underpin OBPM, and the flaws that these contain' (Lowe and Wilson, 2015). They find that genuine research into outcomes is prohibitively expensive and so organisations use unreliable easy-to-collect data as proxies for genuine information, and that apparently positive outcomes cannot be reliably attributed to interventions [p6-9]. Instead, the processes of simplification and abstraction in OBPM turn complex realities into a game, rewarding those people who are able to produce appropriate data and punishing those who are not (p14). As Lowe and Wilson conclude:

'The theoretical flaws in OBPM mean that this is not a technical problem that can be fixed. It is not a problem that can be fixed by better measurement, or better causal-chain modelling. In order to improve the performance of social interventions, we must move beyond the OBPM approach. If we want people to change their tactics, we must change the nature of the game itself' (Lowe and Wilson 2015).

OBPM in higher education

The subordination of academic activity to commercial goals in the UK has been discussed at least since E.P. Thompson's 1970 text *Warwick University Ltd* (Thompson 1970). Berg *et al* identify the shift from exchange to competition, the movement from equality to inequality, and the turning of academics into human capital as the key features of neoliberalism in the universities (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen Forthcoming). For many academics these processes are experienced most immediately through the 'audit cultures' and 'rituals of verification' within which our work is increasingly understood - what HEFCE critiques as 'the metric tide' (Wilsdon 2015). In a helpful summary, Burrows argues that the life-world of the university is increasingly enacted through ever more complex data assemblages emanating from routine academic practices such as recruiting students, competing transparent costing diary exercises, calculating workload models, submitting returns for research assessments, teaching, giving feedback, applying for research funding, and publishing and citing the work of others. Different metrics operate at different scales – departmental, school, faculty, institutional, national and international. 'It would, he contends, 'be quite easy to generate a list of over 100 different (nested) measures to which each individual academic in the UK is now (potentially) subject' (Burrows 2012).

This 'metricization of the academy' (Burrows, 356) is not simply a new game we have to play to continue our work as before or do the same thing slightly better. Rather, it has far-reaching consequences in how we think and do schoalrship. Strathern observes that such audit cultures not only lock up times, resources and personnel, but they change public moralities and are thereby worthy of studying as 'a distinct cultural artefact' (Strathern 2000). Burrows contends that OBPM has gone beyond the auditing of accountability, and now functions as part of 'quantified control.' In the neoliberal world of student fees and ever-greater competition for student numbers, and research grant incomes, 'these metrics function as a form of measure able to translate different forms of value' (Ibid, 368). The implications are profound: 'Academic *value* is essentially becoming monetized, and as this happens academic *values* are becoming transformed.' Metrics become so reified that academics cannot but help reorientate their practices towards them. Davies argues that in being obliged to rephrase our work in neoliberal language to please paymasters, OBPM engenders 'a powerful relanguaging of our work' and therefore a reworking of what we understand it to be and how we value it (Davies 2005). Petersen found that many early career researchers struggled to articulate the value of their work outside neoliberal productivity discourse. OBPM is not value neutral, it changes how we value academic work (Petersen In progress). This has proved a particular concern for the humanities (Nussbaum 2010; Collini 2012) .

Apart from refiguring senses of value and work, the literature suggests that OBPM has significant negative personal effects on academics. Franco-Santos *et al* surveyed 1000 HEI employees and interviewed over 100 more on the impacts of OBPM, and concluded that it is 'associated with lower levels of staff wellbeing as well as lower levels of institutional research excellence' (Franco-Santos, Rivera, and Bourne 2014).In an autobiographical account, Gill shows how neoliberalisation of the university invokes emotional and affective reactions including exhaustion, overload, insomnia, shame, guilt, hurt, worthlessness, and uselessness (Gill 2010). Furthermore, Petrina and Ross suggest that these processes may differentially affect minorities with the academy, such as women, part-time, and lesbian and gay academics (Petrina and Ross 2014; see also Collier 2014). As Gill asks, how

is the changing experience of working the neoliberal university 'gendered, raclialised and classed?' (Gill, 229).

Raising the Bar

Newcastle University has witnessed many elements of neoliberalisation in the past decade. For example, an expensive programme of corporate rebranding (Wæraas and Solbakk 2009) saw the university change its name by ditching the historic co-ordinates 'upon Tyne' as it developed money-making campuses in South East Asia and London. A range of teaching practices was imposed on academics by the so-called 'Newcastle Offer,' designed as a student-recruitment marketing tool. Likewise, 'workload models' have been variously introduced across the university, making heterogenous processes commensurate in terms of value to which hourly labour rates could be ascribed, 'a crude attempt to reduce all aspects of the academic labour process to a common metric' (Burrows). As with all UK universities, importance was placed on university scores in the league tables generated from external research and teaching auditing exercises.

In 2015 a marked intensification in the shift to OBPM occurred with the announcement by the University's management of the so-called 'Raising the Bar' (RTB) initiative. This aimed to making the university rise in research and recognition league tables, and to generate more grant income. It sets quantifiable performance expectations for all academic staff on three key metrics: research income, published articles in so-called '4 star' journals, and successful PhD student completion rates. RTB's roll-out in the university encompassed an ambitious ambit. Headline mechanisms are that annual reviews, promotion, and new appointments are to be tied closely to RTB: thus performance in this metrics becomes closely associated with rewards and punishments. As well as 'sticks,' the management has promised 'carrots' of increased financial help to further research, especially targeted at those parts of the university deemed to have the best chances of establishing themselves in strong positions within competitive national league tables.

 In practice, RTB has been formally linked to a huge range of less visible university activities. For example, RTB has been placed as central to the university's new London Campus, and its criteria have been embedded in new funding arrangements for 'engagement' activities, conference support, faculty research groups, and the like. In HaSS faculty it was quickly followed by proposals to run annual, external, anonymous REF-preparation audits. Senior management insist not only that there is no alternative to this programme if the university is to secure its future, but also that the emphasis will be on supporting, encouraging and enabling staff.

Town-hall meetings run by the Vice-Chancellor and by faculty pro-VCs and research deans have couched the programme in the quintessential neoliberal language of competition: different 'units of assessment' (not departments, schools etc) are plotted on charts with some described as 'excellent' in contrast to others within the university, based in part on how they figure in national league tables in competition with their counterparts in other universities. As Berg et al write, one of the most significant consequence of neoliberalisation in the university is 'reinforcing competition between individual academics, academic departments, academic institutions, academic disciplines and states.' As Gill writes of university neoliberalisation generally, RTB is an 'individualising

discourse' (2010, p240) – responsibility for hitting international and national league table metrics is transferred to individuals in their personalized targets based on which school and unit they work in and their career stage.

In response, many academics from across the university have been galvanized in an unprecedented and striking display of opposition. Well-attended meetings have been organised, formal letters written by individual academics and collectives, and the union agreed to ballot members on industrial action and took the extraordinary step of agreeing to ballot members on a motion of no-confidence in the Vice Chancellor. The dispute has been reported in the THES and more widely on academic blogs (Morrish 2015). Thus although part of a pre-existing movement towards neoliberalisation, the intensity of debate occasioned by RTB suggests it represents a significant acceleration of the process and a key moment in the history of the university, and is worthy of academic study and analysis. As many studies have found that academics have been profoundly concerned at the impacts of audit cultures and OBPM yet have generally accepted them and struggled to formulate effective resistances to them (for example Amit 2000), the debate engendered in Newcastle is also worthy of scholarly reflection in itself. As many reflections on OBPM in universities tend to be anecdotal (e.g. Martin 2016) there is a need for more systematic study of the drivers and effects of such processes.

Research rationale and questions

Given the time and resources invested in RTB, an analysis of how it works and what changes it produces is important in its own terms. Furthermore, following Strathern on audit cultures, we see RTB as part of a wider set of processes forming a distinct cultural artefact worthy of study and analysis. Building on the extensive literature identified above, we identify two major questions about RTB: *how did it come about*, and *what did it do?* Although the focus is on RTB, in recognition that RTB is part of a set of processes ongoing in Newcastle and elsewhere, the questions use that headline programme to interrogate the dynamics of neoliberalisaiton more generally in Newcastle University.

(1) How did it come about and unfold?

This is a question of institutional history and governance. What were the antecedents to RTB? How did it come about? How and why were its imperatives generated and communicated? What were the role of different elements in the university's structure of governance including Council, Senate, Executive Board and faculty boards? How did processes of consultation with academics, students and the union effect its development? What references were made to the existing scholarship on OBPM, and what risk assessments were undertaken in advance? What strategies were designed to ensure its communication and roll-out, and what feedback mechanisms were built into this process? How did opposition/feedback from the UCU and the academic body affect the way in which RTB was communicated and implemented?

What was the cost of RTB? How many hours were spent by managers, academics and support staff planning, launching, explaining and debating the programme, and in generating and handling data? What was the financial cost of this time?

Research suggests that middle managers asked to implement OBPM are 'ambivalent actors caught in the cross-pressures of competing values, identities, and organizational forces' (Soss et al). How do middle-managers at Newcastle – for example deans and directors of research, and heads of schools and units – negotiate demands from their seniors to implement policies they did not devise and may not agree with on the one hand, and loyalty to their colleagues whom they may have to pressure/sanction on the other?

(2) What did it do?

This question forms the bulk of the research, and is approached under three headings: how did it change *practices* of working at Newcastle, *understandings* of that work, and *experiences* of being an academic?

2a: How did RTB change practices of working at Newcastle?

Did it work, in its own terms? Did it allow the production of the requisite data? Did it serve to increase performance of the three key metrics, and did this achieve the desired results of rising in various league tables, especially REF 2020 and the THES global league table?

Did it produce gaming? Lowe and Wilson argue that 'As a consequence of being held accountable for outcomes which are beyond their control, staff who are involved with the development and delivery of social interventions learn to manage what they can control, which is the production of data' (ibid, 14-15). Newcastle academics ultimately cannot control external grant awards, PhD completion rates and journal article acceptance rates, yet RTB makes the evaluation of their careers as 'successful' dependent upon this. Does this produce gaming of the system and if so, in what ways?

Did it produce resistance and subversion? What forms – from active campaigns to oppose RTB, to less visible refusals to cooperate, moves to sabotage the implementation, and the falsification of data, etc. How far were traditional structures such as trade union and staff meetings the vehicles for this opposition, or did RTB occasion the coalescence of new formations and alliances? How far were these alliances conditioned by the organisational structure of the university?

How did RTB refigure notions and practices of research design, implementation, dissemination, as well as practices of teaching, administration, collegiality, pastoral care, and other important tasks? How did RTB change relational practices within the university? For example, did it grow or shrink the space for collegiality and socialization? Did it engender more competition or collaboration between individual scholars and across departmental/school/faculty lines?

Pollitt argues that 'Trust is great asset of public-service organisations, and performance management should complement, not compete with it.' Do academics feel RTB increases or decreases trust between them and the management?

2b. How did RTB change understandings of academic work?

Did RTB function simply as a means to existing ends, or did it change understandings about what the university is for?

Did it facilitate greater understanding and loyalty to the vision of the university espoused within RTB by the management, or did it produce cynicism and senses of disconnect?

Lynch suggests that neoliberalism in the university may lead to a sense of permanent failure to live up to the idealized academic performance (Lynch 2010). Did RTB alter understandings of what academic labour is, and how its success is evaluated?

How did the increased surveillance through measuring metrics affect understandings of academics as autonomous and professional agents?

How far did RTB alter the vocabularies with which academics thought and spoke about their own work?

2c. How did it change individuals?

Following feminist insistence on studying real lives (Gill, 2010) we want to know how RTB affected academics across the university. Did Newcastle academics feel pleasure, excitement, hope, encouragement and determination as RTB was rolled out? Or anger, frustration, fear, and anxiety? Is OBPM experienced as oppressive as some of the literature suggests, or is it seen as an opportunity to further one's research and career? Using quantitative and qualitative data (where possible comparing with quantitative surveys in previous years), we will examine the impacts of RTB on a range of quality-of-life indicators such as happiness, job-satisfaction, retention, and work-life balance. Did academics and managers regard Newcastle as a more or as a less rewarding place to work as a result of RTB?

Was it associated with higher, lower or unchanged workloads? Was it associated with increased, decreased or unchanged levels of stress, mental health, and personal wellbeing (including quality of caring relationships, after Lynch 2010)?

Was RTB experienced differentially by early, mid and late-career scholars? Were these experiences gendered, classed, and racialized? Was it experienced differently by academics on different types of contract – zero-hours, part-time, full-time, teaching only, etc.

For all these questions in part 2, we will ask whether these processes were significantly differentiated between humanities, social and physical sciences, and by faculty or school?

Research programme

In order to answer these questions, this project builds on the energy generated in Newcastle around this debate and the expertise of Newcastle scholars and their external colaborators to run a multi-disciplinary, longitudinal, qualitative and quantitative, real-time study of the unfolding of RTB. Using

a range of methods including the keeping and analysis of diaries, autoethnographies, interviews, textual analysis of university documents, and quantitative analysis of inputs and impacts, it will aim to tell the story of RTB and the impact of neoliberalisation in Newcastle more generally from perspectives of senior and middle managers as well as academics and trade unions. This will be of value both for Newcastle University in the first place, but also for understanding universities generally. In order to help other institutions learn from our experiences, UCU and Universities UK will be invited to be non-academic impact partners.

It is conceived to develop in three stages.

Stage 1: Pilot, and 2015-2020

Beginning with a pilot project before Easter 2016, and following suitable ethical approval, academics from across the university will be invited to start keeping a diary of their experiences, reflections and feelings around RTB. This includes personal reflections and feelings occasioned by any RTB-related communications, town-hall meetings, corridor-conversations, staff-meeting discussions, or how RTB and its criteria are invoked at verification rituals such as annual research reviews, REF-dry runs, promotion applications, experience on appointment panels, and the like. It will also include reflections on how broader academic practices have been affected, including the approaches to research which RTB seeks to modify (grant applications, publication strategies, PhD supervision) and those which it may inadvertently influence (practices of collegiality, staff-student relations, teaching, career choices, etc). These will be recorded in a standard format with guidance material provided, in the form of diaries. Guidance material will navigate issues of ethics and informed consent. We would hope to secure the participation of dozens of scholars from all three faculties. Participants will be encouraged to save copies of all RTB-related emails and other documents received from different university management levels.

This will quickly start producing a rich (anonymised) dataset, and given the intensity of debate at the moment it is imperative that it occurs quickly. At this initial stage, agreement to participate in maintaining a diary will be kept confidential and will not entail a commitment to share it for research later. If the roll-out of RTB continues, this dataset will prove an invaluable source of material to understand the human dimension of RTB and will lead to stage 2. Whether research eventually continues or not, it will be empowering for academics to feel that their experiences and feelings matter enough to be recorded.

The pilot stage of this research will lead to a HaSS-sponsored 'sandpit' event, either just preceding or following Easter 2016 vacation. Academics from across the University will gather to discuss how best theorise research on RTB, refine and develop the research questions in this initial document, and design a suitable set of methods to answer them. Input will be invited from people who have undertaken the pilot diaries study.

An advisory board has been formed of leading UK and international scholars working on topics germane to RTB. The board will comment on research ideas. A steering group of Newcastle scholars has assisted in providing more detailed scrutiny of plans and ideas.

To download copies of the blank diary and instructions/covering letter, see the project website www.rtb-research.org

Stage 2: 2016-17

On the basis of the discussions at the conclusion of stage 1, the diaries research will be refined and rolled out more widely across the university. A smaller number of scholars will be invited to undertake the more demanding task of auto-ethnographies, for which training will be provided and for which further ethical approval will be sought.

A HASS Faculty Bid Preparation Fund grant will be sought to prepare for a major research bid. Leading experts will be invited to a rural retreat centre outside Newcastle for a workshop on RTB and how to understand it in global contexts, and to work on refining a grant proposal. Initial results from stage 1 will be presented, and work will begin on a major inter-disciplinary grant proposal to be submitted to the ESRC, or a suitable cross-disciplinary call with the AHRC.

At this stage Universities UK (via the Newcastle University executive) and UCU (via the Newcastle branch)would be formally approached to be research/impact partners to disseminate findings (see below), but participation in the diaries research will be sought from both UCU members and non-members alike.

Stage 3: 2017-2021

If a large grant is secured, a mutli-disciplinary team of internal and external experts, including two full-time RAs, one working on qualitative and one on quantitative methods, will conduct the research. This design is provisional and subject to deliberations in stage 3, but could include:

1. Qualitative aspects of the research would focus on answering the questions identified above through: interviews with managers at all levels, members of different governance bodies, union activists and other academics involved in the debate/dispute, and other academics and concerned parties; diaries and auto-ethnographies; textual analysis of documents and archival materials.
2. Quantifiable information on features of working life such as work-life balance, relations at work, working conditions, and skills and prospects can be obtained by asking participants to provide information through questionnaires similar to the Quality of Working Life in the UK survey (Denvir et al. 2008)). In Stages 1, 2 and 3 participants will be asked to complete, at regular intervals, Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) questionnaires similar to those produced by Edwards *et al.* (2009), which are aimed specifically at Higher Education Employees. This will enable longitudinal analysis of the relevant measures with the aim of studying changes in working quality of life. Some questions could be tailored specifically to ask about RtB related issues, and others to very specific opinions such as the Desire to Leave.

Other quantitative outcomes to be recorded could relate to days off sick (classified as stress-related or otherwise) visits to occupational health or other medical providers, capability procedures imposed, instances of disciplinary action, etc. A final quantitative analysis will be based on a comparison of performances in REF2014 and REF2020, including proportions of staff entered, and grade-point averages.

Leading academics in the UK and internationally will be invited to participate. It is hoped that cooperation with both the university management and UCU will provide access to interviews, archival materials and quantitative data from all relevant parts of the university, including its higher level governance structures.

Ethics, objectivity, and reputational damage

Ethical concerns

There are three key ethical concerns raised by this research. The first is anonymity of people who are interviewed, whose experiences are captured in quantitative data sets, whose interactions are recorded in auto-ethnographies, and who (in their official capacity) make statements at town-hall meetings or who author internal documents and send internal emails. In no way must it be possible to identify individuals, and standard procedures to anonymize people by concealing the faculties, schools and roles they have must be followed. Of course, if an individual gives explicit permission, an interview or other interaction may be cited under their own name.

 The second key issue is consent. For interviews, respondents will be shown information sheets, asked to sign consent forms, explain how the data will be used, and informed that they can withdraw consent at any time. For auto-ethnographies, a process will be designed to ensure that colleagues give informed consent for the conduct of an ethnography within their unit.

The third key ethical issue is safety of informants and participants. Initial discussions about research design with potential participants for the pilot diary exercise have found a common view that RTB is potentially coercive and that the recording of private experiences could be used by university managers to discipline academics by denial of promotion or punitive changes to contracts. To address these concerns, participants will be assured that information about their involvement will not be stored on any networked computer or sent through NCL email accounts. A separate, password protected-file system has been established off-campus for this purpose. The associated email account is rtb.research@outlook.com

The pilot research diary project has successfully completed HaSS ethics review process.

Objectivity concerns

One important issue is the objectivity of this research. To ensure that this is as objective as possible, the research design above incorporates the following elements:

- On the suggestion of a research middle manager, the research project's methodology will be designed around a sand-pit event in which scholars from different traditions and with different perspectives will be invited to participate. This event will focus on a scholarly study of RTB and associated processes, and will not act as a forum to debate its merits.
- The research will seek to answer questions of particular concern to the management ('does it work? How can it be made to work better?) as well as to academics ('what are its impacts and what can be done about it?').
- It seeks to involve both UCU and Universities UK as research partners, and will design a results dissemination programme that is of value to both.
- An international advisory board will be formed to comment on research design. Recognising that some of the UK's leading experts on the topic work at Newcastle University, the project will bring a broad range of scholars together with leading international experts who are able to stand back from the Newcastle debates and bring international perspectives to research design.

Reputational concerns

A final concern, raised by university managers in discussions about this research, is reputational damage to individual managers and to the institution. The first point is covered within issues of anonymity above: it is imperative that it is not possible (for anyone but the person involved) to be able to identify individuals who appear in research presentations, unless explicit permission is granted.

On the second point, as Wæraas and Solbakk demonstrate with their study of a Norwegian university, it is possible to conceal the name of an institution on which a study has been conducted so that a reader with no connection to the institution or region cannot be sure of identifying it (Wæraas and Solbakk 2009). That may be appropriate and possible in some publications, but not all. Ultimately academic truth and independence means that the presentation of conclusions and material is led by the research process and data itself. In one potential scenario, it the research discovers that RTB fails in its own terms and has a detrimental effect on the experiences and understandings of working the university, then the imperative to present this material to a wider scholarly audience will trump the desire to reduce reputational damage. Indeed, an explicit scholarly critique of it may be an invaluable contribution to academia informing both managers on the reform of university governance and academics on how successful strategies of resistance can be framed and pursued. However, if the research discovers that the outcomes of RTB are positive both in terms of its stated aims and in terms of the broad experience of intellectual labour at Newcastle, then foregrounding the Newcastle experience will serve a positive role in helping managers and scholars at other institutions negotiate neoliberalism by learning from the pioneering path set by Newcastle. Ultimately, subject to due ethical concerns about the safety and anonymity of individuals, it is the scientific findings of the study alone which must govern publication and dissemination strategies.

Outcomes

A range of outcomes are projected from this research.

- a co-authored monograph, 'Working the neoliberal university: metric management at a UK University.' This will be a landmark study in its inter-disciplinary breadth and longitidunal engagement. No comparable study exists to date: indeed, Franco-Santos *et al* observe that 'we know little about the type of performance management mechanisms used in UK HEIs and the influence these mechanisms have on the wellbeing of staff and the performance of HEIs as a whole' (ibid, 7). This research will make a major contribution to filling that gap.

-academic publications in a range of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary journals. These may be variously co-authored, but academics doing auto-ethnographies could publish under sole authorship. We will arrange a writing workshop to facilitate the production of auto-ethnographies, so this project may produce an unusually large number of publications.

- workshops with UCU/Universities UK run around the country on the Newcastle experience, and what can be learned from it and how academics can respond to it neoliberationsation within the university. With 1 in 6 universities now setting grant targets (TES, 2015), there will be wide interest in this.

- A play, staged at Northern Stage. Perhaps the most perceptive interrogations of the changing governance structures of the academy have been in creative media such novels (Oakley, Birmingham etc). We will thus find appropriate partners at the research/theatre interface to produce a stage play which enacts the qualitative findings about academic experiences of RTB and the dissonances felt by academic managers in NCL. It will be performed for university and civic audiences, and performances will be used to facilitate discussions within and without the university on the changing nature of Newcastle University and how its experiences relate to those of people in other employment sectors in the city.

- Depending on findings, our recommendations concerning RtB style motivation could potentially lead to an Impact Case Study, and we note the case study of Van Laar (2014)relating to the improvement of the wellbeing of employees by assessing and enhancing quality of working life.

Nick Megoran, February 2016.

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