THE INFLUENCE OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ON KEY ACTORS IN UNIVERSITIES

The case of an English university

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Similarly to what has happened in other public service organizations, data analysis shows that there has been a substantial increase in the measurement of performance in the university over the years. Most areas are now assessed, albeit many interviewees agree that better measures could be in place in some of them. The area that lacks measurement is third mission, even though most interviewees considered it an important area to explore in the future.

This increased level of measurement results, mainly, from a greater competition between universities, and demands to become more efficient, effective and accountable, translated from the policies implemented by the British government since the 1980s. Therefore, the main pressures to measure come mainly from the State and the market (the ‘outer ring’ of our framework), whose role has considerably increased over the years.

Many of the interviewees mentioned the lack of action regarding the data. This issue was particularly raised regarding individual performance, both of academic and nonacademic staff. There was the feeling that there has been a decline in the ‘academic-voice’ in institutional decision making and a decline in the ‘academic freedom’. Nevertheless, it was noted that academics still have an active voice, especially in strategic decision making.

The pressures to become more efficient, effective and accountable have also changed the role and influence of non-academic staff, even though administrators have always had a strong role at this university. As the university grew and decisions needed to be made faster, the influence of non-academic staff became increasingly important. They now represent 63 per cent of the university staff and some academics are concerned that administrators ‘step too far’ over the line, endangering the ‘collegiality’ element. Nevertheless, the ‘collegial type’ of co-ordination still persists at this university, contributing to a fairly consensual partnership between managers and academics.

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