Why Social Science Matters
Issue 1

Managing change in learning and teaching

Edited by Malcolm Todd and Darren Marsh

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Preface

Why Social Science Matters is a new series of essays published by the Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics, which is part of the Higher Education Academy. These papers aim to provide a space to explore a range of ideas, through the lenses of the social sciences, around learning and teaching. We will publish WSSM to accompany sessions and conferences at existing C-SAP events, or to reflect on contemporary events and happenings in learning and teaching in Higher Education. WSSM serve as an introduction to a debate and for reflection afterwards, and take a variety of forms, from short provocative essays, to head-to-head conversations and debates, to longer think-pieces and interviews with leaders in specific fields. Contributors write in an informed but informal style, making the work accessible to a wider academic and non academic audience. If you have ideas for an edition of Why Social Science Matters, then please feel free to discuss these with the series editors.

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Leading article
1. Is There Too Much Management of Change in Higher Education?

Ranald Macdonald, Professor of Academic Development, Head of Strategic Development, Learning and Teaching Institute, Sheffield Hallam University

"I tell my people that change and change for the better aren't necessarily the same thing." Karen Brady, Businesswoman of the Year, Desert Island Discs December 2007

“Change We Need.” Barack Obama's 2008 US Presidential Election Campaign slogan

Where does the change come from?

Change has become so ubiquitous within Higher Education, as in most areas of society and the economy that too often we do not stop to ask 'why?' or, perhaps more importantly, 'what would happen if we didn't change?' A new Vice-Chancellor is a good predictor of imminent change, often to the rest of the senior management team! The election of a new President in the US or leader in any other country is usually a similarly good indicator of changes to come, though whether these reflect election promises is often a moot point.

In Higher Education, whether it be changes to organisational structures - from departments, to schools, to faculties and back again over a regular cycle; to the curriculum; to the latest approaches to learning, teaching and assessment; to initiatives from Funding Councils or the Government; we do not seem to be able to avoid the experience of change or initiative overload.

However, as implied in the quote at the beginning, change need not be a bad thing, though we may not necessarily agree on what 'for the better' means. What often goes wrong is not so much the lack of recognition of the need for change as a failure to articulate a clear change model or process, and not engaging people in that process rather than just focusing on achieving particular outcomes. Perhaps what is really wrong is too much 'management' of change.

In this article I will explore the notion of a university as a complex organisation, using some aspects of complexity theory and emergent change, together with writings on successful educational change (as well as some failures) to provide some suggestions for influencing change. In doing so I will be arguing that we can all bring about change for the better but that it may not be capable of being 'managed' in the traditional sense. Rather, we need to focus more holistically on the university, recognising the diversity of players in the process.

The challenge is to see change as a process in which everyone is encouraged and rewarded for taking risks, being creative and operating 'at the edge of chaos'. So much more exciting than the traditional technical rational approaches adopted by many institutional managers whose initiatives are often doomed either to reluctant compliance if not outright failure. Longer-term initiatives such as the
National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) and Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) are intended to give space for creativity to be fostered and encouraged but even here the managers' bureaucratic tentacles can constrain.

**Exploring change**

Ralph Stacey is Director of the Complexity and Management Centre at the University of Hertfordshire and has written extensively on complexity and organisations. His increasingly familiar Agreement and Certainty Matrix has proved useful to many in understanding why change does, or doesn't, work in their organisation. The matrix comprises two dimensions – the degree of certainty and the level of agreement.

Where the outcomes of management decisions are close to certainty and there is a high level of agreement, so-called technical rational approaches predominate. Here data from the past is used to predict the future and specific paths of action can be planned. At the other extreme, where there is no certainty or agreement, anarchy and chaos will be the norm and we don't want to go there, unless you are of a particularly radical political persuasion. However, reality is normally somewhere between the two extremes.

The closer one is to certainty and agreement, the better traditional management approaches will work; the further away, the more likely individuals are to ignore or avoid the situation. However, between the two extremes is a large area which Stacey calls the ‘zone of complexity’ and others ‘the edge of chaos’. This area perhaps best reflects the reality of many organisations, not least Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), where the complexity of the situation can be daunting if managers and their colleagues don’t realise that this is what the world is really like and, whilst it should be treated with respect, is not necessarily to be feared.

Complexity may be contrasted with, or situated between, simple and chaotic and, as such, is more normal than we perhaps believe. It provides the opportunity for creativity, innovation, risk-taking and even play – ‘having fun’ is a much undervalued concept in organisational life but is recognised in some organisations, for example in software development and design, as being central to creating a livelier and exciting environment. One only has to watch children with paints, brushes and paper to see how creative and imaginative they can be whilst apparently just having fun at play.

As complex organisations, HEIs comprise large numbers of units, individuals or agents, each of which behaves according to some set of rules but adapts according to those with whom it is interacting. This interaction and adaptation leads to the notion of self-organisation which, whilst not chaotic, is neither predictable nor easily controlled – the manager’s dilemma! Within complex systems the result of agents interacting and self-organising leads to the notion of ‘emergence’. And this is at the heart of change within many organisations. It is unpredictable and reflects us being ‘at the edge of chaos’ or where, as Paul Tosey

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characterises it, the challenge to managers is ‘to act in the knowledge that they have no control, only influence’; perhaps a reality of matrix management models.

A number of writers, including Richard Seel writing about his experiences at the BBC, characterise large organisations as ‘complex adaptive systems’ in which change, however unpredictable it may be, may emerge if certain preconditions exist. These include connectivity or a lack of fragmentation; diversity of ideas, people and approaches; appropriate rates of information flow throughout the organisation; the absence of inhibiting factors such as power differences or threats to identity; a clear sense of purpose; and some constraints to action or effective boundaries.

So, whilst institutional policy-makers spend much time in preparing corporate plans, detail the necessary actions and put in place Key Performance Indicators to measure the outcomes of their endeavours, perhaps the most important aspect is to arrive at a clear sense of purpose; why are we here? what do we have to contribute? how can we help to continually enhance the experience of everyone here? To the more cynical in larger organisations these may be seen as trivialised mission, ethical or value statements, whilst they are often at the core of smaller units whether in business or education.

It may be somewhat apocryphal now, though still of interest for our context, that a visitor to the NASA space centre at Cape Canaveral on asking a worker sweeping the road what he was doing was met with the response “I’m helping to put a man on the moon!” How many of our security staff, caterers, cleaners, finance and estates staff, and even academic staff and Vice Chancellors, if asked what they were doing would answer “helping to improve learning in the university”? Despite its obvious shortcomings, it looks as if the National Student Survey is being used to address this question, though often with a distinctly managerialist flavour to the improvement of responses.

How individuals respond to any change initiative often relates to whether they have a sense of ownership for the process and outcomes, the extent to which it is felt as something being done to them, and how much it challenges their sense of identity, beliefs and/or values. In an HEI, where academic and other staff are often grouped into discreet, often fairly autonomous units – departments, schools, faculties – or even smaller groups within these, such as subject groups or course teams, staff are likely to see their primary allegiance as being to this unit and the wider disciplinary or professional community, before the institution to which they belong. This so-called ‘loose coupling’ is certainly a challenge for institutional managers, academic or otherwise, who increasingly focus at a corporate level – an interesting terminology in itself for a university or other HEIs.

Can change be managed?

An interesting conundrum. Or is it more a case of nudging, pleading to people’s better nature or self-interest, or just allowing it to emerge? It may be more a case
of ensuring that the conditions are such to permit or promote change of a particular sort or in a general direction. However, managers at whatever level often feel they have to ‘manage’ and this is often taken synonymously with “I have to get things changed”. ‘Moving the deck chairs on the Titanic’ is a perhaps somewhat unflattering description of many change initiatives, not least because to compare our institutions to a sinking ship does little to boost morale or get buy-in. However, in an era of performance-related pay, greater accountability for achieving institutional and external objectives and increasing managerialism, managers may feel they have to be seen to be ‘managing’. And they are sent on management and leadership courses to tell them how to do it – if they are ‘lucky’. Otherwise they may dip into the latest airport departure bookshop best sellers for inspiration – I’ll refrain from referring to ‘tipping points’!

The history and legacy of many funded change initiative such as the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP), Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) and the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) is not great. Whilst there may have been some significant local change, though too often based around the enthusiasm of a small number of individuals, large scale systemic change has been more problematic. More recent initiatives such as the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) and Research-Informed Teaching (RIT), which have been intended to promote a more strategic approach to educational change, have often been implemented through small scale projects or short term appointments.

This is obviously a gross generalisation and some will say “it’s not like that in my institution” but these, and other possible examples, perhaps effectively illustrate that short-term change initiatives are unlikely to lead to more systemic movements to, as Karen Brady referred to it, ‘change for the better’. That takes longer, is less predictable, but is perhaps more exciting, rewarding, risky and likely to lead to deep cultural change. A major challenge is to move institutions from seeing ‘risk management’ as risk aversion, and towards encouraging and rewarding risk taking which seeks to achieve the purposes of the organisation. The pharmaceuticals industry would never have progressed if all failures led to retribution.

To conclude – have we started at the wrong place?

My own experience is that significant change often starts with a coffee bar conversation, throwing ideas around, sharing them with others, formalising them in papers and recognising that everyone in the institution has a stake in the resultant change – whether it be organisational or to learning and teaching.

In that sense many of us are not ‘managing’ but rather taking a lead and influencing and perhaps the title of this article should have been ‘Leading Change in HE’. Then I could have got into all the theories of leadership, whether leaders are born or made, and whether leadership, like management and change, should be top down, bottom up or from the middle out.
Which is no help at all to those who have the title or call themselves 'managers', except perhaps to realise that HEIs are not, and should not be seen as, production lines producing knowledge as a consumable good. The words 'management' and 'academic' do not sit comfortably together and whilst it might be right to argue that we should be more business-like in our endeavours as organisations, we still have the creation and transfer of knowledge and learning at our core.

Now, what does Barack Obama’s slogan mean and what will it mean if he wins the election? (This article was written a week before the US elections).
2. Leading Change – and Why Social Science Matters

Kevin Bonnett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience Manchester Metropolitan University

A sociologist in a suit - travesty or triumph? After teaching sociology and politics for 26 years I moved on to roles with no space for anything much besides management - except, I hope, a smidgeon of leadership. Now after roles as Director of School and then Executive Dean I have moved on to be Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) at Manchester Metropolitan University, helping to lead a substantial programme of change. So have I forgotten my social science? Is it any use for leading change? My answer is mainly pragmatic and but also informed by my old stock-in-trade – social theory.

The pragmatic aspect concerns tool-kits and antennae. There have been times in the past when sociology threatened to condemn itself to irrelevance by persisting in set-piece oppositions between partial perspectives spuriously paraded as the whole truth about social reality (ritually knocking each of them down in turn because of their flaws in portraying the whole truth even when they never claimed to do so). Generations of students were either turned off by this theoretical Punch and Judy Show or instead they took up whatever concepts and insights they found useful for understanding, regardless of supposed ontological or epistemological incompatibilities. In other words, they gained a conceptual tool-kit and employed its contents whenever they seemed helpful. I have to confess that I do this eclectic conceptual DIY all the time. Faced with ingrained cultural barriers to change, or with perceptions about what isn’t possible within the regulations when those regulatory blocks are long gone, I try to penetrate this life-world of common-sense and remind myself that things perceived as real are real in their consequences (even if not all the consequences are explained by the perceptions ...).

As well as this conceptual tool-kit, the other essential pieces of equipment in change leadership are antennae, and the best way for a human to grow them is to grasp the sociological imagination. In all my time of teaching this was the holy grail – to achieve and pass on that leap of insight and that obtuse, oblique perspective which treats the ordinary and taken-for-granted as strange, wondrous and – here’s the payoff for change – essentially constructed and malleable. Why do we need antennae? Because all the most challenging opportunities and constraints in change management are about people – primarily our colleagues – and their presumptions, aspirations, values and feelings. The last thing one can assume in university leadership is that all these personal dimensions, and the behaviour associated with them, can ever be over-ridden by top-down edicts compulsorily defining the organisation’s mission, values and key objectives. But who needs antennae to tell when our colleagues are unhappy with these things when they are so adept at critique, mistrust of authority, and professional role-distance? I think we do need to grow antennae to distinguish when people are genuinely at odds with the organisation’s
aspirations, and when their annoyance or demoralisation is to do with practical implementation, ineffective delivery or personal lack of empowerment in the process. Each of those dimensions will require different kinds of action to address them, so we need to understand which ones are at stake.

So, having exercised our sociological imagination, applied our conceptual toolkit, and twitched our emotionally intelligent antennae, how do we actually get anything to change? Maybe other aspects of social science can come to the rescue. If people make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing, change leaders need to pay attention to shaping those circumstances they can control and taking full heed of the ones they can't. If agents (in this case colleagues) continually construct their choices and actions within regulatory and organisational parameters, within resource constraints, and with a view to perceived consequences, there is scope to change each or all of these things through managerial initiative. Faculty/departmental structures; budgetary regimes; vertical, matrix or task-based organisational principles: each of these can determine the parameters for rational action.

What's more, the most effective way to influence action (apparently paradoxically) is through transparency and empowerment. Given fuller information and more space in which to make informed and reasoned choice, colleagues are quite capable of strategic thinking and balancing difficult trade-offs. Empowerment harnesses people's intelligence while dependency and subordination structurally encourages that cynical, victim culture of resentful critique that we know so well in academic life. That said, actors' decisions can be steered by controlling incentives and consequences as well as structures - and senior managers will try to do this for the sake of institution-wide objectives.

Thus, in the spirit of pragmatism informed by eclectic social scientific insight, here are this author's top tips for leading change in universities:

1. Be absolutely clear about the future vision and promote dialogue about it and the values that underpin it. And do this in a language that's cleansed of all the critical success factors, KPTs, KPIs, etc that lurk beneath it. Then people know where “there” is, and you know whether they really do reject the vision, or just dislike the means of getting there.

2. It's obvious that the change process is about getting from “here” to “there” – ideally over a defined time-scale. But what is not obvious is whether everyone shares a common perception of where “here” is and how it needs to change (if at all). Many of the disputes and resistances to change revolve around this rather than disagreement over vision and aspirations.

3. Don’t confuse distress and dissatisfaction over imperfect transition and implementation with outright opposition. Fix the lousy implementation if you can.

4. Put structural and resource parameters in place, then empower and incentivise colleagues to make plans and choices within this framework,
so that people are actively aligned towards corporate goals through their practical choices rather than through persuasion and exhortation. With that empowerment also comes accountability and consequences.

5. Remember your passion for social science and apply it!

And now I'll go and change out of my suit.
3. Why Social Science Matters? 
Managing Change in Higher Education

Robert Mears, Professor of Sociology, Head of School of Social Sciences, Bath Spa University

Professor Macdonald has offered a useful review of the challenges of managing change in higher education. The attempt to understand change is a key part of social scientific enquiry, and sociologists have sought to make sense of the pressures for change, and debated the extent to which it can be managed or controlled. We can distinguish between change that is conscious and purposeful, with a deliberate strategy of implementation and evaluation, and change that is a response (sometimes reluctantly) to pressures from without. In the UK, higher education has been compelled to respond to a number of external pressures. Rapid expansion of student numbers has altered the social basis of universities and challenged, among other things, teaching, learning and assessment practices. In addition, globalisation and the internationalisation of curricula, increased student mobility and the interconnectedness of global social processes have a series of impacts on universities. Add to this the rapid development of new technologies for learning, and cultural changes in the ways in which people communicate and share knowledge, and it is inevitable that there will be challenges to the balance of power between university leaders, staff and students. As students make a larger financial contribution to their education it is fanciful to expect them to remain docile and grateful. The rebalancing of the contribution of students and the wider taxpayer to the costs of HE through tuition fees gives a hefty push to ideas of students as consumers.

As well as responding to a more diversified student population, universities have become more transparent in terms of the quality of research and teaching. This drive towards greater accountability is seen by some as an unnecessary and even malign intrusion into their world. It now seems a cosy world in which universities educated a small minority with shared social and cultural capital, with a reasonable expectation that graduates would take their places in the elite of the labour market. Add in the deference and gratitude that came from 'free' HE, and we can see that the lives of our predecessors were very different from ours. Nowadays we have to ensure that students are equipped for a rapidly changing world in which the shelf life of subject knowledge is limited. So, a challenge for HE managers is to convince academics that these changes are inevitable and desirable. Instead of change being imposed by a self-serving managerial elite, we should encourage a view which sees it as part of our professional responsibility to cope with and manage such change. The alternative is the nihilistic rejection of 'the management' based on an outmoded and elitist version of what the university ought to be. We should also beware of the vogue for describing change as part of a 'neo-liberal, market-driven' agenda. Such claims are long on rhetoric and short on evidence.

A view of university governance which counterposes collegial (good) and managerialist (bad) is crude and simplistic. Such a dichotomy is based on a poor
historical understanding of the university and a parody of modern ‘management’. Collegial relations are valuable, but are limited in terms of delivering accountability to wider society. It seems paradoxical that the demand for greater accountability of other occupations, such as doctors, police officers and social workers, is articulated by academics who reject such imposition on themselves.

It is common for lecturers to believe that change is driven autocratically form the ‘top’. Simultaneously, senior managers are equally convinced that the direction of the university is shaped in important ways by the actions and decisions of ‘autonomous’ academics. This mismatch of perceptions is common in many areas of life, but it provides the social scientist with great opportunities for research. Universities can never be top—down command structures. Their success depends on the imagination, creativity and commitment of rank-and-file academics. This is why traditional management nostrums are often found wanting. Academics are skilled at frustrating the ambitions of managers. Excellence in teaching or research is rarely achieved without gaining from staff the ‘discretionary effort’ beloved of management gurus, and this is hard–won and it demands energy and patience. In making the case for change there has to be a compelling rationale, a sound argument and powerful evidence to convince an intelligent and critical workforce. Such a process might even mean that the end-result is improved by the critical investigation it has been subjected to.

One of the aims of sociology is to encourage a truly critical approach. What does this mean in reality? For me it means the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions, the ability to uncover motives and interests that may lurk unrecognised behind facile slogans and, perhaps most importantly of all, an ability to bring the discipline of ‘evidence’ to debates about change. Social scientists should understand not only how to analyse data but to create it. The excitement of sociology is that we can create new data, and the rigours of methodology ought to mean that this data should not be predetermined, merely providing a comfortable confirmation of pre-existing prejudices. The best social science generates information that confounds expectations.

I agree with Ranald Macdonald that major national initiatives to bring about change in teaching and learning have had limited impact. One reason may be the deep conservatism of lecturers who cling to outdated models of practice. Change is made more difficult because HE is populated by people who are themselves products of an elite system. This contributes to an unfortunate tendency towards nostalgia about higher education and a conservative suspicion of change. Sociology shows how we have lived through a period characterised by a dramatic decline in ‘status’ as an organising principle of social life, and a consequent decline in the respect accorded to experts of all sorts. This puts academics in a tricky position because our raison d’être is expert knowledge. In this maelstrom of change – often unwanted and resisted, there is a desire to find someone or something to blame – the Vice Chancellor, the Government or ‘international capitalism’. As Norbert Elias points out, the attribution of blame is psychologically very satisfying but it rarely makes for valuable sociology.
4. Managing Universities: a Question of Degree

Kym Teh, Faculty General Manager, Flinders University, and doctoral candidate, School of Computer and Information Science, University of South Australia and Professor Mark Israel, School of Law, Flinders University

“To compare the university to the modern corporation, the classical bureaucracy or the imagined community is, in the minds of many academics, to compare music to money, or literature to town hall legislation. In the end they are thought to be alike in all unimportant aspects.” Simon Marginson and Mark Considine in the ‘Enterprise University’ (2000)

‘The University should act like a business’. Pronouncements like this, typically emanating from senior management and their consultants, send a shudder through many academics who see such a vision of the future or, increasingly, an interpretation of the present as a threat to what they hold dear. Academic freedom and collegiality, academics appear to have learned, are to be protected against the barbarous tendencies of managerialism.

We have no doubt that academics have had some bitter experiences with poor management but we wonder whether key academic values might be able to survive and actually even thrive under better management.

Many of the stakeholders in universities have sought to manage universities. Governments in many countries have attempted to use funding mechanisms to mould university missions, governance structures, channel research into ‘useful’ areas or ensure that the sector supplies a sufficient number of graduates of the right type to meet the needs of the economy.

However, these need not be the only reasons for more effective management. Several commentators have either analysed the phenomenon of or advocated the adoption of entrepreneurialism stimulated by management within universities. Based on a series of case studies from North America, the United Kingdom and Australia, Burton Clark, for example, suggested that we were witnessing the emergence of fast-to-develop and quick-to-respond groupings situated at the periphery of the university, and ranged around a traditional academic cluster of disciplines whose directions and interactions were steered by an institutional core group. While much of this literature has focussed on the role that management plays in stimulating the periphery, some degree of managerialism might also enhance a university’s ability to achieve its most university-like objective, meeting the needs of the ‘academic heartlands’, namely the pursuit and sharing of knowledge.

Resistance to steering by management can be fuelled by a sense that managers and academics are pulling in different directions. There are various ways in which these power relations might play out in the form of tensions between
managerialism and academic values. We have referred to the types of institutions that might result as: the ‘command and control’ university; the ‘shared office’ institution; and the ‘Edge of Chaos’ university.

**Command and control**

Highly corporate and commercial universities are based on top-down management emanating from a Board, with a Vice-Chancellor acting as Chief Executive Officer, and associated executive structures setting the mission, strategy, and detailed implementation. This top-down management sets detailed key performance indicators through the organisation’s line management structure. The organisational structures are well defined, if not rigid, and there are specific lines of accountability and responsibility. Faculties and schools act like strategic business units within corporate commercially-focussed organisations.

**Serviced office**

On the other hand, where organisational structures are very weak, it is arguable whether members of the university regard themselves as having to act in the interests of that institution. As the Carnegie Foundation International Survey of the Academic Profession found, the vast majority of academics are more likely to align themselves to the aims of their discipline, rather than a department or any institution or organisation. It is possible for the aims of an institution to be almost wholly irrelevant to some academics, who look to it to provide a serviced office – physical space, some administrative support, access to information technology and a library, as well as a fee for service. One might even conclude that institutions such as this have moved outside any sensible definition of organisation.

**Edge of chaos**

We’re not sure that many academics entered their profession with a desire to operate in either of the two environments that we have just described. Indeed, it is unlikely that many institutions that only behave in these ways can flourish for long. We may not want to be told what to do, but we hardly want to be left alone to drown in the competing demands of research, teaching and administration.

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi suggested that we all work best when the challenges we face are commensurate with our skills – we are neither bored by routine nor overwhelmed by anxiety. So, if a manager wants colleagues to be engaged and focused on their work, they need to be allowed and encouraged to operate at the edge between boredom and anxiety, between the order of an established routine and the chaos of turbulent uncertainty. Working on the edge might even turn out to be fun.

Interestingly, at a different level, commentators on organisations have made similar arguments. In their seminal and groundbreaking work *Competing on the Edge, Strategy as Structured Chaos*, Shona Brown and Kathleen Eisenhardt...
describe a partially structured organisation. According to Brown and Eisenhardt, for an organisation to be able to thrive, it must evolve, making mistakes and learning from those mistakes through a process that they describe as experimental probing. They also suggest that organisations have to be able to operate both on the edge of chaos – with central management setting loose parameters for direction and implementation – and the edge of time – with plans emerging and adapting to unfolding events rather than being fixed rigidly in advance. The organisation must also allow change to occur proactively rather than reactively.

While originally framed in the context of companies operating in an environment of rapid and unpredictable change, such as the information technology industry, the core elements of their approach to organisational strategy do make sense for universities. As Marginson and Considine acknowledge, academics might continue to shudder at the prospect that universities might be compared to business. However, if we are to adopt some of the lessons of business management in the university, it would be better if managers and leaders acknowledged that the commercial sector has more to offer than the hierarchy of command and control. Instead, universities that can compete ‘on the edge’ might be able to become truly adaptive organisations, applying useful lessons from business to a continually changing environment.
5. Management of Change in Higher Education

*Dr Elizabeth Lawrence, Principal Lecturer in Sociology and Faculty Equal Opportunities and Diversity Co-ordinator, Faculty of Development and Society, Sheffield Hallam University*

**Changes we need and changes we do not need**

Perhaps those of us working in HE should adapt the Obama election slogan to ‘Changes We Need and Changes We Don’t Need’. As Ranald Macdonald’s article suggests there is a danger of change fatigue and initiative overload in Higher Education. Sometimes this leads to the loss of valuable and experienced staff, who feel they cannot live through one more re-organisation. Are these colleagues dinosaurs who cannot keep up with the times or are they the voice of sanity questioning whether the latest change is really beneficial or necessary? I believe the latter. Let me emphasise that I am not arguing that all change is bad, nor that everything from the past was good. Indeed as someone whose current management role involves the promotion of equality and diversity, bringing about some changes is part of what I try to achieve in my work. There is a need, however, to question the premise that newer is always better and that change necessarily leads to improvement. One of the biggest challenges in the management of change is deciding which changes are beneficial and which are not.

**Changes we need**

I would identify four changes we need:

- More academic freedom and collegial governance;
- A greater proportion of academic staff time spent on teaching, research and scholarship;
- More student engagement with learning;
- Advances in the equality and diversity agenda.

Universities are not businesses and they fail when they attempt to become ones. There is a need for more academic freedom, including the right to challenge received ideas, and a return to more democratic and collegial forms of governance, in which academic considerations, not business or administrative ones, dominate. Academic freedom and collegial governance are linked.

We need a higher proportion of academic staff time spent on research, teaching and scholarship and less on servicing administrative process. In HE we have not only the problem of work intensification, but also work intensification that involves more time being spent on managerial and administrative processes. Academic staff are being required to spend time on activities that should not be part of our jobs.
The growth of testing in schools, e.g. SATS, has led some students to understand education principally in terms of passing assignments. This destroys enjoyment of learning. Growing instrumentalism has produced a mindset in which there is an obsessive focus on marks and feedback, but little interest in knowledge or curriculum content. We need more student engagement in the university as an academic community.

Lastly universities need to make real progress on equality and diversity. This means using equality impact assessments to review organisational processes and proposed changes. It means employing more BME and disabled staff. It means giving more space in the curriculum to equality and diversity.

**Changes we do not need**

I would propose three:

- The obsession the new, especially with regard to IT and teaching;
- The marketisation of HE;
- The rise of edutainment.

The obsession with the new often takes the form of beliefs that everything must be IT-enabled, that technology must be used because it exists, and that only innovative teaching methods are good. The over-reliance on technology is harmful to the environment and can produce students with poor social skills, since they expect everything, and sometimes everyone, to be available at the click of a mouse.

The growing marketisation of HE leads too easily to the perception that students are buying degrees and hence can complain, usually about their teachers, if they are not satisfied with their grades.

The tendency to use student satisfaction as the measure of teaching quality is dangerous in terms of academic standards and leads to the rise of edutainment. This actually deprives students of a real education, because they never learn the self-discipline of sticking at a difficult task. It also does not prepare them for life.

**A note on the growing problem of over-management**

UK HE suffers from a growing problem of over-management. Some of its causes and manifestations are described below.

**a) The quality control industry.** Quality control or enhancement processes have increased massively in some universities. The ideology of continuous improvement is used to imply staff are never good enough. The time spent on quality work is a cost against quality in teaching, research and scholarship. The sector would benefit from a 12-month moratorium on all work on quality. Then we could see how many quality processes are actually necessary.
b) HR initiatives. There has been a remarkable growth in size of HR departments in UK universities in recent decades. This leads to a danger of work creation, in the form of appraisal systems, management training etc. The implementation of job evaluation under the national pay framework has led to more emphasis on recording and measuring what staff do. There is a tendency to equate performance management with appraisal-related pay, as in the Mission Critical report, which argues the majority of academic staff under-perform.

c) Over focus on the quantitative and the measurable and the electronically recordable. There is now recognition that the extensive electronic surveillance in society may raise issues of democracy and civil liberties. Should we also be worried about the growth of central computerised systems for recording timetabling, holidays, workplanning etc? This can lead to inappropriate surveillance of staff.

d) Managerial career needs for re-organisations. There are no prizes for leaving things well along. There are no autobiographies by successful company executives which say 'I found company X running smoothly and left well alone.' On the contrary, managerial careers are better served by re-organising and even re-naming things. This looks better on the CV when applying for the next job, and if the changes are a disaster, there is a good chance the change-leader will have moved on to the next job and not have to pick up the pieces.

Conclusion

What academic staff actually need to be productive and to work effectively is to be left alone to get on with teaching, scholarship and research, not micro-managed. EP Thompson in the Making of the English Working Class talked about 'taking our time' and the culture shock the factory system produced for workers used to the rhythms of agricultural labour or cottage industries. Academics in UK HE need to regain our time.
6. A History of the Present

Professor Michael Neary, Dean of Teaching and Learning, Lincoln University

“All history is the history of class struggle.” Marx, Communist Manifesto, 1848

For academics and students writing in the Marxist tradition real social change – or history, in other words - is the result of class struggle. While history is recorded as something that happens in the past, it is actually being made in the moment within which it is being written. Foucault, a French social theorist, called this ‘the history of the present.’ It is this history of the present that Marxists argue forms the dynamic for constant change.

Marxist academics and students maintain that social change occurs as a result of social protests against forms of authority and control that make social life unbearable. In the most recent history these protests have included the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement and the labour movement. Another key form of protest was the student movement, which in 1968 dramatically transformed the nature of teaching and learning in higher education.

What connects all of these protests is that they are particular instances of struggles against the most general form of social oppression, defined by Marx as capitalist relations of production.

A more commonsensical way of defining the social relations of capitalist production is the way in which money, the most universal form of capital, has come to dominate all aspects of the social world. As the only legal and consistent way to acquire money is through waged work, all aspects of social life are dominated by the imperative of earning a living. The problem is that waged work is by no means secure. In an increasingly competitive world people are forced to work harder or for less money, so that the population is always at risk of exhaustion, underemployment, unemployment, poverty and debt.

Not all forms of protest are about money and work, but may also be about access to the control mechanisms of a society that is dominated by the social relations of capitalist production. In capitalist society these control mechanisms are maintained by those who have most to gain from the process. There is no guarantee that having achieved power the social relations of work will be changed; but, as change is always a distinct possibility, real democracy based on progressive social movements must be curtailed.

As working for a wage is not an instinctive form of human behaviour, people must be disciplined into the logic of waged work. Education plays a key role in this process, referred to by social scientists as socialisation, with Higher Education fulfilling an important role in training knowledge-based workers.
Since the 1980s universities in the UK, along with other public institutions, have become increasingly dominated by the logic of money, expressed as various forms of commercialisation and marketisation.

This has occurred most dramatically for university students in the UK with the introduction of student fees, re-defining the student as a consumer of higher educational services.

For academics, the effect of commercialisation has been experienced as ‘academic capitalism’. One of the most pervasive of these capitalist strategies has been the introduction of private sector management techniques into public sector institutions. This has resulted in the intensification of academic work alongside a dramatic expansion of short term contracts for teaching and research staff, an accountancy driven audit culture and the creation of a two tier system of universities, i.e., research intensive and teaching only institutions. Some academics are also concerned that ‘academic capitalism’ is undermining the academic enterprise, which flourishes through the free flow and exchange of ideas, by the conversion of academic knowledge into various forms of intellectual property.

Ranald Macdonald’s paper is a critique of this ongoing managerialist culture, which he describes as an ubiquitous process that often appears as change for the sake of change, rather than change for the better. Ranald Macdonald’s analysis is written within a framework of management science. While this approach is capable of interesting insights it lacks the critical distance needed to add real academic content to the issue under review. Management science is deeply implicated with the managerialist culture that Ranald Macdonald is writing against.

This lack of critical distance results in a tendency towards tautology. A clear example of this is the way Ranald Macdonald tells us that universities are complex organisations that can be explained by reference to complexity theory.

Ranald Macdonald’s tautological analysis is further undermined by his narrow representation of complexity theory. The key aspects of complexity theory, making it a distinguished addition to social science, are its insistence of the need for an historical perspective to provide a context out of which emergent forms are derived; its call for an holistic understanding of the nature of the context which is being investigated; its presentation of chaos not as a form of disorder but as a prelude to a new form of order, and its refusal to look for analytical solutions that are in anyway reducible to the sum of their parts.

Ranald Macdonald’s version of CT has none of these properties. It has no sense of history, with its lifecycle of significant events being the time it takes for a VC to be replaced; his idea of holism is to deal only at the level of the institution, ignoring the social process out of which the institution has emerged, creating a profound disconnect between the economy and the rest of society, and the purpose of his analysis is based on an effort to find analytical solutions to problems that he argues can be reduced to the sum of their parts.
Writing in the Communist Manifesto Marx wrote that real change is achievable through the development of communism, by which he meant progressive alternatives to the logic of waged labour. At the moment we have only glimpses of what those alternatives might look like. The university, with its tradition of the free exchange of knowledge and the generosity of the peer-review system, are examples of activity that undermine the monetarised logic of waged work. It is to our own academic tradition and custom that we should look for progressive change, rather than managerialist solutions whose outcome is to prevent real change and keep us locked into a potentially catastrophic present, the consequences of which are beyond human calculation.
7. The Values of Change in Higher Education

Professor Max Farrar, Manager, Community Partnerships and Volunteering
Leeds Metropolitan University

For more than 100 years sociologists have argued that knowledge is laden with the values of those who produce it. Marx's epithet that the ruling ideas of any society are those of its ruling class may be judged, today, as a little crude, but, as with all generalising simplifications – and sociology is not much more than a series of simplistic generalisations – this remains a crucial starting point. As he often did, Weber rounded out Marx's view by noting that knowledge is inseparable from values – no knowledge is 'value free' – and Habermas's discussion of the link between knowledge and human interest developed this point.

So if sociologists write about management of change in higher education (HE) in Britain today, we need to sort out our starting points: what position do we write from? Those who see higher education as yet another arena for the never-ending class war that capitalism engenders write from the position of the worker, locked in conflict with the manager/boss. From this standpoint, 'working class values', are for workers' solidarity and resistance to the unceasing effort by the manager/boss to exploit the labour force. The manager, on the other hand, has adopted the values of those who control the university, usually aligned with the values embodied in the government-directed funding council. He or she then writes from that position. A central value for this group now seems to be that change is good in itself, because it is the sine qua non of the competitive economy in the Twenty First century. The conflict between these two positions marks HE today.

I write about change in higher education from a third position which accepts two of the values just referred to. Both of these rely on an agreed analysis of the nature of HE today, namely that HE is a business operating in a highly competitive, capitalist economy. Like the Marxists, I positively value the labour of the workers in this business – the lecturers, the cleaning staff, the administrators. Like the managers, I value change – at least when it results in positive intellectual, emotional and social development. Put like this, we might begin to wonder why there is such conflict in HE today: the managers say they value the labour force, and the workers say they value positive change.

I'm going to call my standpoint that of 'the disenchanted professional'. I don't exactly fit the Marxist category of worker. But I do accept the sociological analysis of the welfare sector as one in which almost all of us are pushed towards the speeded-up, regulated, productivity oriented working conditions of the classical factory worker (but I still have much more autonomy than that allowed to the factory worker.) Nor am I a manager. I am a professional, with all the
privileges that accrue, and I am disenchanted with the business of HE, particularly the way in which it is being changed.

Professor Macdonald’s analysis of change in HE concentrates on the process of change. I would prefer to concentrate on what higher education is, and should be. HE, like everything social, is a structured series of social relationships. The people in those relationships are not free agents. Their lives are structured by the forces of class, gender, race, all of which have impacts which vary according to your age, your physical ability, your education and such like. But they actively, and reflexively engage in social relationships, endeavouring to shape them, and the institutions which they form, according to their own values and material needs.

Thus, while certain people in HE may well see change as, in Prof Macdonald’s words, an ‘opportunity for creativity, innovation, risk-taking and even play’ – all of which, like him, I value positively – we must pay close attention to those who, because of their structured roles, have very limited access to those opportunities. Working in the cafeteria on the minimum wage has (hopefully) its playful moments, but if change means (as it usually does) serving more customers more quickly, it is not going to be welcomed. To the surprise of most students, and new recruits to the academic staff, change for us also means serving more customers more quickly. We serve bite-sized chunks of sociology; they serve bite sized meals. The nourishment from both is often questionable. The worrying thing is how small a part both play in shaping the changes that take place around them.

The situation does not need to be a dire as this sounds. All of us, at every level of the university, are here because we share its broadly liberal ethos and its valuing of education as a – perhaps the – social good. Most of the joiners at my university have children in HE or in graduate jobs. (Most of the cleaners are overseas postgraduates with a greater commitment to HE than most of us.)

What baffles this disenchanted professional is how rarely the senior managers spell out how the changes they are ‘managing’ contribute to the overall value of higher education. My university gives much prominence to its Vision and Character, whose tenets I think we all subscribe to. Yet when change takes place (usually contributing to the inexorable rise of our staff-student ratio, always decreasing our ‘space footprint’) no-one explains how this will improve the student’s learning and social experience, which is the bottom-line value to which we all subscribe.

So my suggestion is that universities cease to worry about the management of change. They should recognise that universities are (as Prof Macdonald says) complex social institutions. Because conflict is endemic in any complex organisation, we need to locate the various value positions and social interests that are operating. By engaging all staff, at all levels, in a debate which centres on the value in the intrinsic worth of education – our shared starting point – we would deliberate more precisely on what the university should be doing. Should the direction of change, for example, be to more closely ally us with the interests
of businesses? Should we passively accept the reduction in the unit of resource? Only the trade unions debate these issues at present – but they are crucial to the whole university. In my current role, I seek to contribute to the debate about how far the student and staff experience should be outside the university – contributing to the regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. If the object of ‘managing change’ is to make it simple, or agreeable, then that’s a pipe dream. But universities are places where we could at least properly debate change, and democratically agree what should be done.
8. Too Much Management of Change?

Afterword by Ranald Macdonald

What an interesting and eclectic set of rejoinders to my original piece!

In response I have to set out my position a little more. I am not (and never have been) a sociologist, of whatever political or intellectual persuasion. My, now somewhat distant, background is as an economist working for a major bank – oh, I can smirk now – before taking a PGCE and teaching business studies and economics on a range of HE programmes as well as being a module, course and divisional leader and then moving into academic development in 1994. In this role I am interested in how to change learning, teaching and assessment ‘for the better’ (to quote Karen Brady again) through a range of approaches at institutional, faculty/departmental, course and individual module and class or learning experience level.

As such, I am sceptical of many of the change initiatives, not least the use of small-scale projects, and with my colleague Anthony Rosie, as Co-directors for the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (one of the 74 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning), tried to put into practice a philosophy that recognised the necessary autonomy of academic staff to bring about change – what some have referred to as ‘academic freedom’. However, for us autonomy implies taking responsibility and working with others, not independence. Having established the Centre and led it for two years, we moved on to new and different challenges in 2007.

In this context as an academic developer I also led initiatives to change policy and practices relating to academic integrity and plagiarism, and launched The Assessment for Learning Initiative (TALI) which became part of a larger Assessment Project focusing on assessment practices, institutional procedures and regulations, and the infrastructure to manage assessment. Certainly TALI drew on a model developed by myself and Gordon Joughin (2009) which, using complexity approaches as a loose approach rather than constraining dogma, sought to address issues at multiple levels, involving champions at all levels from classroom tutor to Pro-Vice Chancellor. So, my use of complexity theory, the concept of ‘the edge of chaos’ as a zone in which to take risks and innovate and create conditions for change to emerge is anything but theoretical. It has been tried out in practice – and found wanting at times – but overall provides a context in which policy-makers and practitioners can make links across levels, roles and responsibilities.
So, to address the rejoinders individually. I have much sympathy with Kevin Bonnett’s position and it is probably not that far away from mine. I have tried to develop a conceptual tool-kit which provides a loose context in which individuals can explore their own situation. This requires key people to use their antennae to judge when opposition to change is based on an affront to their personal values or reflects concern about the means rather than the ends. Kevin argues for greater transparency and empowerment and I believe this applies as much to determining the ends as to the means. An open debate about the type of institution we are, the vision and values that drive us and how best to develop a community based on consensus rather than compliance is a challenge in large and diverse institutions. However, many university departments have little in common with others in the same building, as they have their own cultures, traditions and approaches to academic practice. This difference is to be valued and cherished, as it provides a learning opportunity for us all, rather than seeking to homogenise the institution in fixed and often inappropriate structures and processes leading to a compliance culture, as evident in many responses to QAA reviews.

Kym Teh and Mark Israel present a case for the adoption of appropriate practices from business, not least to reflect the fact that businesses and universities are faced with rapid and unpredictable change. By categorising institutions as ‘command and control’, ‘shared office’ or ‘edge of chaos’, Kym and Mark provide a useful point of reference for individuals to reflect on their own experiences but less on how the change from one to another might occur. By using the term ‘business’ we also perhaps fail to make a clear enough distinction between the structures and processes of production line industrial and knowledge-based organisations. Phil Candy (1996), along with many others, has argued for universities to be seen as self-renewing or continuously improving learning organisations and, as Kym and Mark conclude, ‘become truly adaptive organisations’ competing ‘on the edge’.

I am taken by Robert Mears’ case for academics to see coping with and managing change as part of their professional responsibility as part of the growing accountability of universities and their staff as required of other professions. Future pressure from fee-paying students, employers and government may greatly challenge what Robert characterises as ‘the deep conservatism of lecturers who cling to outdated models of practice’. Many of these individuals – ‘themselves products of an elite system’ – do exist but there are also many enthusiastic, innovative and motivated lecturers who love learning, their discipline and their students but are frustrated by institutional processes such as timetabling, room layout and furniture, assessment regulations and the pressure to research at the expense of developing teaching. It is also certainly not apocryphal that some recipients of National Teaching Fellowships ask for no publicity in their institutions as it may harm their careers!
I agree with Elizabeth Lawrence’s comment that we should perhaps focus on ‘changes we need and changes we don’t need’, which is why I used Karen Brady’s quote about ‘change for the better’. However, I am not sure that there is such a widespread consensus about what is ‘better’ other than for some to look back to ‘the good old days’ and others wishing to radically overhaul the whole system. The majority perhaps sit in the middle bemoaning change of whatever sort as there seems to be so much of it. It is hard to disagree with Elizabeth’s list of changes we need and those we don’t. For me a particular challenge is how to engage students more in their learning and, whilst here is not the place to rehearse the argument, I feel that the over prescriptive nature of teaching and learning into learning outcomes and assessment criteria is limiting the autonomy of learners and teachers and the serendipity of much learning for which ‘intended learning outcomes’ are not a helpful framework. Whilst some learning may be routine and then tends more towards training, real learning should, I believe, inspire and challenge learners and teachers (their co-learners) in a spirit of enquiry. This approach can apply as much to the professions as to the liberal arts or sciences as it is more about the ‘how’ and why’ of learning than the ‘what’.

Max Farrar rightly takes me to task for focusing on the process on change rather than the nature of higher education. Those who know me understand that it was the constraints of the word limit and genre which perhaps edged me towards that position. As implied above, for me a ‘higher’ education should provide something very different from a higher ‘training’, which is what much of what goes on in universities is beginning to feel like and which the implications of Leitch can only exacerbate. I also accept that it can appear to be somewhat trite to suggest that everyone can have ‘fun’ but at least everyone should have a rewarding experience from being employed in whatever function in the place. I also wouldn’t disagree with a move away from an emphasis on the ‘management’ of change and more towards the leadership of, and engagement with, change by all in an open and democratic way. At the same time we should perhaps occasionally acknowledge that our VCs and senior managers are paid their high salaries for a reason, including providing vision, leadership and promoting the values of a higher education through their words and actions.

And finally, to Mike Neary’s response. I have a real difficulty here in that I don’t share or even understand his view of the current world and, in particular higher education, or the way history has shaped it. For example, whilst some of a particular ideological persuasion might believe that the student movement in 1968 ‘dramatically transformed the nature of teaching and learning in higher education’, others might be more hard-pressed to see any real reforms until the changes brought about by the QAA in the early 1990s and the Dearing report in 1997 (and I am grateful to Professor Anthony Rosie for his observations here). Similarly, I feel it is too simplistic to characterise the UK’s as a two-tier system of research intensive and teaching only institutions, as the recent Research Assessment Exercise confirmed. Whilst there might be groupings of institutions along a spectrum who form alliances according to their perceived common interests, higher education in the UK does have relatively heterogeneous elements which may or may not relate to an earlier binary divide but whose character has been changing.
So, where does this leave us? The day after the results of the US election were announced I contacted an American academic colleague to ask “so where does this leave Obama’s ‘change we need’?” His response was that “change we got!” Time will tell as to the nature and impact of the change but for many there is a hope and willingness to engage in ‘change for the better’. Whether one adopts a managerialist, collegial or other analysis of the future, the only inevitability is that change will happen though the outcomes may be unpredictable and full of challenge for us all. Ron Barnett moves us from complexity to supercomplexity and characterises a higher education as ‘learning for an unknown future’. Now that does provide a challenge to managing, leading or promoting emergent change – whichever one prefers …
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As part of our ongoing research into teaching and learning within the social science disciplines, C-SAP has maintained an interest in publishing scholarly monographs, often led by our academic coordinators and drawing upon a wide range of contributors from the academic community. From our ninth monograph, *Teaching Race in Social-Science and Humanities Higher Education* (ed. Emily Horowitz) we have been using an online service for printing and distribution. This will offer a number of advantages to our publication strategy in future:

- **benefits for C-SAP** - improved sustainability and more effective ordering service (move away from bulk ordering and distribution to directed requests via our website);
- **benefits for authors** - wider distribution of work internationally; greater promotion amongst search engines and other online collections; other promotion tools including social networking;
- **benefits for readers** – extra facility for reviews of books; PDF versions of manuscript free to download;

We envisage that our *Why Social Science Matters* series will follow this model of publication and distribution. Full details of our monographs, and PDF copies of individual chapters, are available from the publications area of our website: http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/resources/publications/. Remaining copies of our monographs can be requested from enquiries@c-sap.bham.ac.uk, or chapters can be downloaded from our publications web link.

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ELiSS is C-SAP’s online journal, and will produce a series of regular and thematic issues. However, its main focus is on articles/digital records and commentary submitted by all who work in higher education with an interest in the social sciences. The journal uses Web 2.0 technologies and particularly encourages contributors to use such opportunities. The editorial board encourage a wide range of submissions and seek to attract the following:

- a critical analysis of teaching and learning which takes account of national and international developments;
- reflections on practice which can inform and support others;
- exemplars of innovations which are theorised and supported through scholarship;
- engagement with theoretical debates within the social sciences which inform learning and teaching;
- exploration of the dynamic and changing processes in teaching and learning.

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C-SAP provides a unique opportunity to draw on the different strengths of the three disciplines to analyse and shape current practices and debates in higher education. We engage with staff, departments and students through a wide range of activities including our publications, annual project funding, events and workshops, special interest groups, C-SAP Associates, as well as our annual conferences.

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