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Author(s): Hemmings, B.C. ; Hill, D.M. ; Sharp, J.G.

Title: The transition from a university college to a university: a United Kingdom study

Journal: Tertiary Education and Management

ISSN: 1358-3883

Year: 2015

Pages:

127 - 139

Volume: 21

Issue: 2

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URLs:

FT: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2015.1018310>

PL: http://primo.unilinc.edu.au/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=CSU2&docId=dtl_csu81958

The transition from a university college to a university: A United Kingdom study

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Abstract

As a result of policy changes, nearly all university colleges in the UK have been re-designated as universities. This transition was studied in one such institution using semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of six academic staff and the transcripts subjected to a thematic analysis. This analysis identified three themes: *staying in the past; developing as a university; and, awakening to challenges*. A cultural framework was used to help interpret the results of the analysis which highlights how the traditions of the institution have influenced the speed and direction of the cultural change process. Another key finding from the analysis was that very few of the leadership strategies commonly used to support a process of transition appeared to be employed. The article concludes by offering insights about the change processes relevant to leaders of other institutions in the process of or seeking to change status in similar or related ways.

Introduction

In countries including Australia, Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (USA) there are higher education institutions that have degree-awarding power but are not recognised as fully-fledged universities. A subset of this form of institution in the UK is referred to as a university college, though the use of this term, even within the UK, is not entirely unambiguous. As noted by Tight (2011) in his review of the UK higher education sector, there were at least ten university colleges in the UK with some ‘well on the way to becoming independent universities in their own right’ (p. 655). Since 2012, and as a result of a succession of independent reviews and recent policy changes (see, e.g., Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2011; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)/Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), 2012; Browne, 2010), nearly all of these university colleges have been re-designated as universities because they met specific criteria for accession to university title.

This change to the UK higher education sector, and the lack of any study identifying the effect of these re-designations at the institutional level, prompted the research reported in this paper. The paper considers how the transition from a university college to a university, for one of these institutions, has been viewed by a cross-section of its academic staff. It has two main foci: one, a focus on how the shift to university status has posed some key challenges for the institution’s senior managers and other staff holding academic positions; and two, a focus on the recent and planned responses to those set of challenges.

Even though the term ‘university’ is difficult to define (Tight, 2011), for the purposes of this paper universities are viewed as having ‘responsibilities to advance knowledge through

research, maintain and disseminate this knowledge through effective teaching, and foster intellectual independence' (Geddes, Stonyer, Reid, Dreyfus, & Hodson, 2004, p. 323).

Literature Review

This review concentrates on two corpuses of literature. Firstly, consideration is given to research that has looked at how institutions have made or are attempting to make the transition to university status. Secondly, attention is paid to a body of literature pertaining to organisational change.

Transition to university

Apart from a brief stimulus paper prepared by Bacon and Bull (2014) that identified a number of leadership issues for UK institutions making the transition to university status, no other research publication has emerged that has considered the impact of this transition on these UK re-designated institutions. In most cases, these institutions have been teaching-led and have sought to become universities by becoming more research-oriented (Hemmings & Hill, 2014; Johnson & Louw, 2014). That said, the shifting landscape of UK higher education witnessed as a recent acceleration of sector-wide growth and diversification, alongside a perceived trend towards 'commercialisation' and 'marketisation', with the nature, purpose, and role universities coming increasingly under the spotlight as a consequence, has not gone uncontested (Barnett, 2012; Collini, 2012; Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014).

However, there is a body of literature relating to university colleges (or similarly titled institutions) in other countries (see, e.g., Dennison, 2006; Muller, 2005). In Canada, for example, a few colleges have recently transitioned to a university. Yeo, Bennett, McNichol, and Merkley (in press), in their description of one college's transition, emphasised how

academic staff, particularly those in junior ranks, felt frustrated by the new expectations placed on them about research and scholarship. This frustration appeared to surface because the leaders of the institution had not factored in a reduction in teaching load to compensate for any expected research activity. These researchers also found that neophyte staff members were uneasy about the transition process, more generally, as the leaders of the institution had not offered clear advice about how best to navigate changes being instigated.

Hemmings and Hill (2014), in their case study of an Australian Christian higher education institution working towards gaining university status, noted that institution's academic staff recognised a transition was in progress but that a successful transition was largely dependent on their respective contributions to the research profile of the institution. In addition, this case study highlighted that the values in the culture and traditions of the institution limited research activities to mostly practice-oriented research, and therefore created a barrier for the institution's accession plans.

From 2004, the South African higher education system underwent significant changes. The major change that was effected, at this time, was the transformation of technikons to universities of technology (or 'new generation' universities). This change process has been studied and the main thrust of these studies was the boosting of research efforts (see, e.g., Muller, 2005). Johnson and Louw (2014), for instance, in a qualitative study of Vaal University of Technology gave their attention to how this university set about growing a research culture to create knowledge; the predecessor technikon was basically tasked with disseminating knowledge to students who were preparing for industry employment. As a way of building a research culture, the leaders of the new university initiated policies including the establishment of awards and other incentives, the facilitation of national and

international conference travel, and the recruitment of research supervisors and postdoctoral fellows. At a more individual level, the institution's leaders implemented programs to strengthen research self-efficacy, foster research collaboration, and encourage self-responsibility. A chief finding of Johnson and Louw's (2014) work was that the institutional leaders, including deans, department heads, and professors, are critical to developing a research culture and needed 'to be talking, engaging, supporting and encouraging research wherever they [were]' (p. 159).

Although higher education institutions in the process of transition to a university face a significant hurdle with respect to research and research cultivation, they also confront a myriad of other challenges. According to Hemmings and Hill (2013), these can include: competing with well-established universities; avoiding relegation to the lowest tier of universities; exploring new found freedom to determine the curriculum; reshaping staff performance frameworks; changing the public image of the institution; managing staff changes; and, communicating and leading a new vision and mission. It could be argued that these specific challenges all have a cultural component. Gardiner (2000) described how the 'cultures' of predecessor institutions persisted in a newly created Australian university and how these ideas, practices, and values led to tensions and created barriers to change. The following section of the literature review explores the notion of organisational change, especially in relation to higher education.

Organisational Change

For organisational change to occur, the values, beliefs, and habits of individuals and teams of individuals need to shift (Schein, 2004). Change is slow and difficult in higher education due, in part, to the decentralised and inherently conservative nature of such institutions

(Miller, 2010). In the context of developing a university culture, where research is central, in former teacher education institutions ‘...successful change requires altering what individuals and groups think about: the need for research knowledge to inform teaching and create more effective approaches to learning, the relative value of researching vis-a-vis teaching, how they perceive their research competence, what outcomes might be expected from their engagement in research, and the extent to which these outcomes are valued’ (Hemmings, Hill, & Sharp, 2013, p. 64). This requires inspiring, engaging, and supporting staff in their change journeys.

Kezar and Eckel (2002) noted that there are six main theories of change, namely, biological, teleological, political, life cycle, social cognition, and cultural, and these help to describe and explain the organisational change process. Social cognition and cultural theories, according to Collins (1998), appear to offer the best means of understanding the complexities of a change process. Social cognition theory is ‘tied to learning and mental processes such as sense making and mental models’ (Kezar, 2001, p. 2). Proponents of this theory argue that individuals are continually discussing, interpreting, and re-interpreting their worlds and that change proceeds because of the actions of individuals. Cultural theory draws on some of the assumptions of social cognition theory but also emphasises the history and development of celebrations, ceremonies, and rituals behind an organisation (Schein, 2004). In order to instigate change, cultural theorists advocate the following: the development of new procedures and rituals; communicating these procedures and rituals; and, changing the motivation of individuals so they adopt the procedures and rituals (Kezar, 2001). Schein (2004) recognised three levels of culture in organisations, namely, artifacts and behaviours, espoused values, and assumptions. He argued that when a culture has been associated with a long history of success, first level strategies such as recognition, reward, and restructuring are

less successful (Schein, 2004) and it is necessary to work in other ways using tactics such as bringing in outsiders with appropriate values and assumptions supported by plans for longer-term transformation.

It could be argued that organisational leaders are able to develop strategic plans and initiate changes relatively easily and in a short time. However, the necessary changes to the organisational culture of educational institutions to facilitate and support these strategies are more difficult to effect and take a longer time to achieve (Owens & Valesky, 2014). Those who seek to lead change need to understand how the current beliefs held within an organisation can support change or frustrate their efforts. The latter is referred to as ‘culture drag’ (Dawson, 2010).

Culture and strategy can be thought of as the two pillars of organisational effectiveness. While culture involves shared values, beliefs, and expectations of individual staff members, strategy is concerned with the processes, policies, and procedures put in place by leaders to achieve the organisation’s goals. These two pillars are not of equal strength as succinctly summarised in Drucker’s oft quoted phrase, ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’ (Coffman & Sorenson, 2013, p. 1). ‘At the end of the day, change management is about reducing “drag” on the velocity [speed and direction] of the change effort, by finding ways to accelerate emotional acceptance and even embrace change’ (Dawson, 2010, p. 97).

Whyte (2009, p. 78) claimed ‘universities are the institutions in society that are the most completely defined by their culture’. A university culture has many facets but some of the values embedded in that culture, for example, independence, creativity, scepticism, and diversity, can be an impediment for change to occur (Donoghue & Kennerley, 2008).

However, Finch, Burrell, Walker, Rahim, and Dawson (2010), through their qualitative study of 23 private colleges and universities in the United States of America, identified practices that institutional leaders could or do use to develop or change a higher education institutional culture. These included: learning from previous errors; doing things differently and imaginatively; inspiring a shared vision; empowering others to act; modelling an approach to be followed; and, celebrating achievements.

A Profile of the University

The institution case studied here is one of a number of smaller higher education institutions located across the UK, each of which maintains a strong reputation, distinctiveness, and presence within its own geographical region and the communities served (Tight, 2011). Like many others of its 'generation', it was founded as a teacher training college but has since diversified to include a portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees spanning the arts and social sciences.

In the ten years prior to this study, the institution successfully gained taught-degree awarding powers resulting in university college status with the conferment of the 'university' title following shortly afterwards. As part of its own evolutionary and transformational journey, as well as the pressure brought to bear as a result of the intensification and prioritisation of research felt across the UK higher education sector, the institution has also identified moving from teaching-led to a more research-informed institution. Describing the institution as teaching-led, is, however, somewhat over-simplistic. The institution's research profile was, at the time of study, broadly commensurate with its size and small complement of research-active staff and much of its measurable research output has been independently judged to be

of national and international standing (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2009, 2014).

Method

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was adopted (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The selection of possible informants was based on three criteria: one, a cross-section of colleagues (including senior academics, line managers, and those in the junior ranks); two, at least three years of employment at the institution; and three, an awareness of the issues, concerns, and progress of the institutional change. An invitation (including an information statement and a consent form) to participate in the study was sent to six academic staff of the participating institution. All six invitees, three males and three females, accepted their invitation to participate.

Procedure

A qualitative approach to data collection was adopted in an attempt to capture the participants' views and experiences of the transition process. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with each interview taking approximately 50 minutes to complete. Semi-structured interviews were employed not only to provide comparable data but to allow the interviewees the flexibility and freedom to express their views as they see fit (Grix, 2004). Even though the senior author carried out the interviews, all authors were involved in the writing of the standard interview questions and had a working knowledge of the institution as they have collaborated in published research covering the three-year period prior to the accession to university status (see, e.g., Hemmings et al., 2013). According to Brenner (2012), interviews tend to be more productive if relevant background information is available when crafting questions and establishing probes as the questions are then grounded

in knowledge shared by those being interviewed. The standard interview questions were also framed to elicit narratives and promote reflection about the transition process. In accord with a suggestion by Macfarlane (2005), the participants were given a copy of the standard interview questions prior to the interview to allow for greater reflection.

It needs to be noted that two of the authors were able to make first-hand observations of the participants and their work contexts, and as well access documents relating to the institution's planning, performance, and response to the process of change.

All interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. The transcribed data were then subjected to a thematic analysis. This form of analysis is deemed especially appropriate for exploratory work (Green & Thorogood, 2004) and followed the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). These steps involve data familiarisation, coding, and the labelling of themes. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82), a theme 'represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set'.

In reporting the outcomes of the study, pseudonyms and other techniques were used to avoid any possibility of identifying individual participants contributing to the study. The study was approved by the authors' respective institutional review boards.

Results

Three themes emerged from the analysis undertaken and these were labelled as follows: *staying in the past*; *developing as a university*; and, *awakening to challenges*. These themes emerged in this order and reflect their relative importance. To assist in the presentation of the

results, illustrative verbatim data are presented and these are attributed to the pseudonyms assigned to the six participants.

Staying in the Past

It was evident in the interviews that a university college culture still persisted and that teaching was the dominant function of the institution. The ensuing quotes are representative of this point:

Not evident that we have taken another step. A university college label fits what we do. (William)

The branding of university on us is just a label. We slip back into a university college mindset all the time. The students say college and the teachers sometimes say (deliberately) college. (Lara)

There is a teaching-led focus in the mission statement. Teaching has permeated everything here. The psyche of people coming to work here was that research was not that important. (Elise)

Two of the interviewees complained that their teaching loads had not changed over the last two to three years and were simply too high to allow any meaningful research to be conducted. Others mentioned that although constrained by the teaching timetable, they were able to still focus some effort on research matters as they had done in the past. To exemplify:

Most of my diary is either working in school or lecturing here. I need more time, space, cover to attend to my research work. I am progressing on my doctorate but progress is slow and this has been the case since I began work here. (Lara)

Even though the institution had contributed to the current Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the earlier Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), there did not appear to be any discernible change in the amount of output produced in recent times. This was supported by the following comments:

The academics who do research and are eligible for our national REF all tend to say that they do most of that researching and writing in their own time. The workload model says there is time to do it but it doesn't work out in reality. The same people are contributing [to the REF] but I don't think their research performance has improved. (Elise)

Submitting for publication and contributing to the REF was a significant step when we were a university college but I have not seen any evidence that we have taken another step. (William)

As implied previously by Elise, the core number of researchers at the institution has remained about the same. There are at least two reasons why this is so: one, a lack of success with the recruitment of research active staff; and, two, those staff who were not researching have generally resisted any push to engage in research. The ensuing quotes expand on the latter point:

There has been an expectation to do research but I don't have the time. This was raised in my performance review but I didn't get stressed by that. (William)

There has been quite a lot of resistance to research because people didn't want to lose that identity of, we are trainers. I find this odd as you can still be research active and be making a real contribution to what's happening in schools. (Lara)

The impact on our more reluctant researchers has been minimal. I think they're a little deaf to the change in the message and the change in the environment around them. (Magnus)

Further evidence that time devoted by most staff to research activity has not increased is apparent in the extracts that follow:

The same people are attending the research seminars but the numbers attending are very small and are dwindling. (Natalie)

There are research dissemination events but these haven't been particularly well attended. People just want to consolidate and get on with their own research or with the rest of the week. (Magnus)

Although research seminars and an annual research conference were scheduled for many years, it was interesting to note that a structured professional development scheme had not been instigated at the institution. A couple of the interviewees expressed their dismay at this, arguing that an institution based on a small work force could easily plan, implement, and monitor a program of this form. William did comment, however, that in his department an attempt had been made to arrange a program on a small scale.

Nearly all of the interviewees discussed how the institution was still a member of its own mission group but had not forged any significant partnerships with other perhaps larger and more research-intensive institutions since becoming a university. These same interviewees reported that no new networking arrangements had been put in place. This lack of action especially concerned Natalie, Lara, and Raymond, who felt that the institution would have benefited by drawing on the research and consulting expertise of other academics located in

larger and more research-focused universities. Natalie, Lara, and Raymond also declared that attracting external research funding would be critical to the ongoing success of the institution and by not building partnerships with proven performers could be detrimental to the institution's viability and reputation, given an increasingly competitive research environment.

No noticeable change in the student clientele was perceived by any of the interviewees.

Various reasons for this occurrence were expressed by the interviewees and these are noted below.

We simply attract undergraduates and postgraduate students from the local area.

(Elise)

Students tend to come here because it's small, and comfortable, and welcoming.

Some come here too because they can't afford to go further away and they need to stay at home. (Natalie)

We attract students based on reputation for primary education based on employability rates and our reputation for producing outstanding teachers. (William)

The student entry criteria have not been altered. (Magnus)

We attract good student-teacher candidates because of the name of the institution and the support we offer. Our size helps these students... in a bigger institution they might get lost. We provide a good quality experience here. (Raymond)

Developing As a University

All interviewees described the events that immediately followed the announcement of the re-designation. These events included rebranding, celebrations, and media reports. One interviewee's comments encapsulate the mood that was evident at this time:

The announcement created much excitement and activity. We had partying, we were in the news, and we even had some freebies. It was a proper public relations exercise. (Lara)

Several of the interviewees pointed out, however, that the celebrations were short-lived and that the reality of becoming a university and what that could entail forced many staff to reflect on their values, beliefs, and practices. Magnus, for instance, focused his attention on how he could now say he worked at a university and did not have to explain any more to his contacts what a university college was. He stated that he had often found an explanation difficult to produce for those not familiar with the higher education sector. Lara thought that she needed to become more involved in research and networking with other researchers external to the university as she could see greater priority being placed on research and research income generation.

Apart from the obvious signage changes, the interviewees talked about significant infrastructure changes and how the institution has attempted to become more entrepreneurial in its focus. The extracts that follow attest to this:

We've seen a real push to developing the conferencing side of the university and rooms are kept aside for this purpose. We've seen new halls of residence completed and we also have the facilities in place to help establish businesses and other commercial enterprises. We rent out spaces and offer expertise and training to these budding business people. We even sponsor a local football team and our name is written across the jersey. (William)

There is something in our staff appraisal system which I've never been involved with and that's called income generation. I think it refers to business development or

consultancy. I have also noticed a change that we need to be more customer focused in our dealings with others. (Raymond)

Other changes to the staff appraisal system were reported. According to Natalie, the system had moved from an appraisal to a performance review scheme, although she, and others interviewed, were unclear as to why this had occurred. Besides a section dealing with income generation, the new documentation for the performance review scheme had added sections on research activity and research targets. Surprisingly, the change in documentation was viewed by some as a departmental initiative and not a uniform change across the institution. This confusion seemed to be the result of poor communication between the senior executive of the institution and line managers implementing the new scheme.

It was patently clear from the interviews that the institution's leadership team had decided to change staff recruitment policy and practices. This change was made to further highlight that expectations around research and track record were to rise for all staff and that any new academic staff member appointed had to hold a doctorate or be close to doctoral study completion. This prioritising of research was welcomed by most of the interviewees; however, Lara said that the new research criterion in the application was proving to be a real barrier. Interestingly, only one offer of appointment had been made since the establishment of the new policy and this offer was rejected by the applicant as she wanted to work at a more reputable university.

Even though it was acknowledged by the six interviewees that the pressure to research at the institution had recently increased, only three of the interviewees felt that the research culture had been growing. Natalie, for example, talked about the increased corridor conversations

being had about research and how the frequency of emails about research and research activity (e.g., conferences) had risen. Magnus concentrated his comments on how the institution had offered him more support, in the form of funding and other resources, to pursue his doctoral studies. Lara also recognised that those studying for their doctorates were well supported through fee help and a mentoring scheme but was critical that certain structural supports had not been erected for those not studying.

As discussions about research have come more to the fore, individual staff members have thought about how the institution's identity, their personal identity, and their colleagues' identities have or might have changed. This point is evident in the following quotations:

Being in a university environment means a little bit more. You're not just a teacher trainer. You need to be a researcher and your thinking needs to shift. (Lara)

My colleagues are not saying I'm just a teacher so much. They may be saying it at home. Or, they may be saying I'm leaving, or they may be saying I've really got to change. I've changed my perspective. I see things differently and I think about things differently. It's a fundamental personal change, it's huge. (Natalie)

We will need to carefully consider our job expectations and descriptions and shape our behaviour accordingly. (William)

We need to be cognisant that our identities (e.g., individual identity, collective identity, and institutional identity) are changing and ensure proper supports are in place to sustain the change. Questions are now being asked about who's a researcher, who's a teacher, and if workload adjustments need to be factored in. (Magnus)

All interviewees, with one exception, had observed that the institution's senior executive had moved to implement other changes, but that the process had been very slow. What appeared to affect the pace of change was that the formalised conversations with staff, designed to generate feedback for the senior executive, were initiated late in the process of the transition and also had not run their full course. Consequently, the institution's strategic review and the release of a corporate plan had been delayed. The comments that ensue indicate some frustration and disappointment with the overall organisational change process:

The senior leaders have not articulated what it means to be a university. (William)

The cultural shift we had to make is going to come too late. (Natalie)

We had a change in the senior leadership and they thought we were a university. It has taken time for them to realise that there needs to be conversation about where we are. There really needs to be more discussion about how we envisage the organisation as a university. We need a deep analysis of what it means for us in terms of the institution's identity. (Magnus)

Awakening to Challenges

Optimism for the institution's future was certainly evident across most, if not all, of the interviews. To exemplify:

The institution has a long tradition and that puts us in a comfortable position. (Lara)

We will survive. We are a good regional university that attracts some good students.

There should be significant input of funds as student numbers grow and this money could be used to support a range of activities. (Magnus)

Although an air of confidence was common across the interviews, certain challenges were identified by several of the interviewees. The following quotes identify some the key issues raised:

I don't think small places like us have a long future. We need to sell our strengths and partner with a big university. That would bring a university ethos and a strong research culture. With a sign outside that said Manchester, Durham, or Sheffield, we'd have far more credibility. (William)

We're a little bit isolated and the higher education environment can be a ruthless one. (Lara)

External pressures might make things difficult for us, especially if we had to compete with the more elite universities. I think there is some risk that small higher education institutions will be eaten by larger ones. (Magnus)

Challenges presenting from within the university, as opposed to those from without, were also mentioned by some interviewees. Natalie, for example, expressed the opinion that more space for research was needed and that more opportunities for learning about research needed to be set up. She also felt that middle and senior managers who did not hold doctoral qualifications and research track records would find themselves in a thorny situation and one that could be detrimental to effecting change. Elise was critical of the approach and time taken by the senior executive in responding to the shift in institutional status. She wanted to see more urgency and energy allocated to communicating a new vision and strategy. In a similar vein, Magnus asserted that too much had been said about the transition and that it was time for the rhetoric to be turned into action.

Elise remarked that if the institution were to be successful in the future it would need to be able to meet the challenges presented from both inside and outside the institution. She argued that a champion or a number of champions would be necessary to lead the fight against these challenges. Whether this champion or these champions are on the current staff register is open to debate but she was convinced that the institution did not have a critical mass of researchers and that more highly qualified staff members with university experience were required. This view was supported by Natalie who was adamant that fresh blood with fresh ideas would help the institution move forward and not just revisit problems that had been faced previously.

Discussion

The six interviewees identified issues and developments relating to leadership, management, the organisation, its culture, and academic staff. The discussion that follows will address these matters in turn, and then consider how the results of the study align with the change theories emphasised earlier. It needs to be kept in mind that the discussion does not repeat the information associated with the themes but seeks to address aspects relating to these themes.

Based on the accrued evidence, only two of the leadership strategies documented by Finch et al. (2010) had been employed to support the transition of the institution to a university.

Glaringly, the leaders of the institution have not been able to effectively communicate the goals associated with becoming a university and this has been done in a way that had not inspired, directed, or sustained staff action. Particular leadership behaviours are pivotal to effective change and have been recognised for decades. For example, Parry (1996) identified that effective organisational change required leadership that has ‘some identifiable goal or

vision or future state that people can desire; and the generation of a willingness within those people to follow the leader along a socially responsible and mutually beneficial course of action, toward that goal' (p.vi). Such a course of action 'challenges how things have always been done and affects the individual emotions which reflect individual commitment to change' (Asnawi, Yunis, & Razak, 2014, p. 5). Emotional commitment is hard to bring about and requires an appropriate model of leadership that incorporates the human features of leadership. One such model is the 'iedex' leadership model which is typically used as the basis for a 360 degree feedback diagnostic (Viljoen & Dann, 2003).

Most of the interviewees were concerned with the limited leadership and managerial roles within the institution supporting the change process. The institution's leaders/managers, not all of whom were active researchers, as evidenced in university performance records, appeared to have concentrated on matters dealing with business enterprise and infrastructure and placed less importance on implementing measures that would support staff change and development. This is not surprising because the latter was of more salience to the interviewees. In a small organisation it is difficult to mobilise all the resources necessary to effect change. The process used to lead and manage change involved some internal workshopping with staff (observed by one of the authors), consideration by a panel, and the subsequent development of a strategic plan which at the time of writing had not yet appeared.

The organisational culture previously described by Hemmings et al. (2013) has shifted in the direction expected of a university but at times has acted as a drag on changes currently taking place. To illustrate, many of the interviewees reported that staff continued to refer to the institution as a college, suggesting that they had not changed their values, beliefs, and habits but stayed with the past. This resonates with the situation described by Gardiner (2000). It is

only through actions associated with leadership, management, and staff development that will assist the institution and its staff to move away from the past.

The key element in the development of a university culture is the elevation of the status of research and the engagement of staff in any related activities. Generally, the interviewees felt that there was little change in the quality, quantity, and relevance of the research being undertaken. This was supported by reference to institutional research performance records. New initiatives such as forging research relationships with other universities had not taken place and no new research funding had been secured. Moreover, the institution was felt to continue its teaching-led tradition despite the change rhetoric at higher levels.

The interviewees pointed out that academic staff members are left with many difficult decisions about what they should do, especially in relation to research and publication. These staff members also remained uncertain about the future of the institution as an independent and sustainable force. These two challenges have created an environment of unease in which there are few long term certainties. For now, most staff members seem to be content with teaching their students and executing other associated tasks rather than actively considering the future. Those staff members who have awakened to the emerging challenges are concerned and some are taking steps to ensure their future in the sector by taking up opportunities for future study and engaging in research.

A number of other strategies available to other higher education institutions are not applicable here. For example, the relative size, status, and tradition of this institution have made it near impossible to recruit researchers with strong track records. Such potential applicants prefer larger and more established universities as do higher flyers within this

institution. This was confirmed through conversations with one of the institution's senior administrators. The loss of high flyers reduced the availability of role models and mentors for beginning researchers.

From a theoretical perspective this study highlights the relevance of both social cognition theory and culture in analysing the process of change within an institution that has been recently re-designated as a university. These two contributions are discussed below.

Social cognition theory proved helpful in understanding the nature of the processes occurring across the institution and the way in which staff members have interpreted the transition in terms of the messages relayed by the leaders and the realities of everyday work. The cultural framework introduced earlier has also been useful in highlighting the barriers to change. In this case, the traditions have prevailed and the speed and direction of change have both been affected. This finding is consistent with the work of Boyd and Smith (2014) who reported the subversion of institutional goals of achieving research outputs and identifying as researchers by academics.

Culture drag is a relatively new notion and as far as we are aware has not been applied in studies of academic institutional change and therefore needs to be addressed in the near future. This may necessitate radical action by leaders/managers such as appointing senior researchers to create and lead research teams capable of attracting external funds. It appears that staff members need to be assured that change is critical to their futures and that the rate of change is appropriate and that support will be forthcoming. There is a culture drag not just because of the slowness of change on part of the academic staff, but the speed of change demanded by the leaders/managers of the institution. These leaders/managers need to

articulate clearly the benefits of any proposed change, otherwise a disconnect occurs between leaders/managers and the staff on the ground.

Arguably, a study of this type not only fills a void in the research literature but also offers information for and identifies insights about the change process relevant to leaders of other institutions seeking to change status or moving through a status change process. While this is a small study, it is built on previous and more extensive research conducted about this institution and its history (see, e.g., Hemmings et al., 2013).

It is too early to tell whether or not the journey this institution is taking is similar to other like institutions that have already taken this path. For this reason, a further study will be necessary to complete the transition account and give a greater sense of the longitudinal nature of the change that has occurred.

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