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ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE IN UNIVERSITIES
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR ACADEMICS

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ABSTRACT

As globalization and the recasting of the university as a tool of economic restructuring have advanced, much higher education has been transformed from a pedagogical exchange to a market relationship founded on the notion of the student-as-customer. This paper considers research findings drawn from an occupational case study of academics in Australian universities using the extended case method. Our argument challenges the current management paradigm of customer focus as a ‘win-win’ situation. Critical to this challenge is the issue of the primacy of the link between consumption and production and its impact on the organisation of academics’ work. We explore the marketisation of universities and the commodification of education as ‘product’; and some consequences for academics, including: organisational change and the redesign of work practices, provision of flexible services to meet clients’ demands, customising courses to fit the perceived demands of students. We conclude that in the future the commercial interests of universities (particularly commercial-industrial model institutions) are likely to dominate academics’ interests in terms of their autonomy, collegial decision-making and ‘academic freedom’.

Keywords: Organisational change, Technological change, Implementing change

INTRODUCTION

Change is a complex process ‘represented by multiple versions of events which compete with each other for dominance’ (Dawson and Buchanan 2005). We argue that globalisation has precipitated, amongst other things, the transformation of higher education from a pedagogical exchange to a market relationship (Smyth 1991, 1995; Miller 1995; Baker, Creedy and Johnson 1996). As in other developed market economies, the change in Australia is linked to the reinvention of universities as a tool of economic reconstruction (Marginson 1995a; Miller 1995; Rooney and Hearn 1999). A neo-classical economics perspective and the primacy of national socio-economic objectives has fuelled a transformation in higher education’s primary role from that of a socialising equalizer to an economic agent with a focus on national economic competitiveness (Smyth 1995). Within the national policy framework and at the level of organisational strategy, this change has developed along with the notion of the student-as-customer.

The leaders of marketised universities have developed customer-focused change strategies which reflect the leaders’ assumptions about student-customer needs and wants, specifically those of flexibility and value-for-money. An unintended consequence of these assumptions has been a shift in the balance of power between academics and students at the level of the service encounter, with the subjugation of academics’ authority to consumer sovereignty, in what has become a market relationship. This paper challenges the current management paradigm of customer focus as a ‘win-win’ situation. Critical to this challenge is an understanding of the link between consumption and production. Sociologists have tended to see consumption as a reflection of production, or a derivative of distribution (Warde 1992) – an insignificant secondary process to the encompassing social relations and economic processes of production.
Post-Fordist flexible production systems lead to a greater differentiation of purchasing patterns within different market segments with the result that markets become subject to greater volatility of consumer preferences. This leads to a need for producers to be more consumer-driven, especially in the case of service industries and the public sector. Therein, argues Saunders (1986), lies the link between the primacy of consumption over production in a post-Fordist, post-modern society. He argues that class based on Marxist notions of one’s role in production has been subsumed by a Weberian notion of class based on status, derived from consumption patterns. Individuals then seek to derive status from their membership of particular lifestyles based on particular consumption patterns – home, boat, car, education, etc. It is in this context that education is seen as something to be consumed, as part of lifestyle and status.

The link between consumption and the organisation of work is made by Knights et al (1999b:3). They raise issues of: the primacy of consumers over producers, or vice versa; the social construction of the customer by management and its implications for a reconfigured labour process; emotional labour between customer and employee in the service encounter; and the significance of the particular production system. The link is clear between mass consumption and Fordist mass production. However, for authors other than Saunders, it is less clear in the post-Fordist customised production system (Knights et al 1999b; Marginson 1995). Flexible production, flexible delivery and the implementation of quality systems, such as introduced into Australian universities since the 1990s, can be seen as responses to consumers. As Knights et al (1995b) points out, the question is whether or not this is a response to consumer wants or if it is a manipulation by producers. Solomon (2004) and Hoffman et al (2004) identify a shift from the primacy of production in the early 1900s’ manufacturing era to a post-modern era of relationship marketing focussing on consumer needs and wants. Such marketing literature identifies consumer behaviour driven by longer working hours, dual career households, and women in the workforce as the catalyst for producer response to consumer needs and the prime mover in changes to production (Solomon 2004; Arnould et al 2004). Marginson (1995) offers a different view: that consumption tends to be determined by production, rather than inversely.

The issue of consumption/production primacy raises the fundamental question at an organisational level, of the social construction of the customer and the impact on the organisation of work. The literature considers how management’s perceptions of customer wishes are translated into a reconfigured organisation of work, enabled through innovative technology (Knights et al 1999a). In particular, flexible delivery in higher education can be seen as one such response.
The organisation of work in the service encounter is also reconfigured by demands by employers for greater emotional labour from workers as a means of differentiation and competition (Knights et al 1995a,b; Crompton et al 1996). Teaching as an occupation has always demanded a high degree of emotional labour. However, with knowledge as a commodity and higher education delivered as a service encounter, additional demands for emotional labour from employees are coming not from the task itself, but from the ‘quality’ demanded by employers through total quality management (TQM) as a means of differentiation and competition. Staff behaviour, responsiveness to customer demands, personal presentation and general attitude, irrespective of the occupational task, are the source of strong demands for emotional labour from workers. The implementation of quality systems as a response to consumer demands, impose even greater demands on workers for emotional labour with direct consequences for the organisation of work and the social relations of the workplace. These changed behaviours are often institutionalised at the organisational level through enterprise bargaining negotiations enshrining customer focused policies such as customer appraisal of employee service, formal customer complaints processes and policies for customer response times.

The factors identified above set the scene for the new industrial landscape in Australian higher education. The socio-cultural, legal/political and economic environments in which higher education operates have changed dramatically in the last decade (Smyth 1995; Back, Davis and Olsen 1996; Cunningham, Tapsall, Ryan, Stedman, Bagdon and Flew 1998; Currie and Newson 1998). This paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of the adjustment of the sector to external pressures, and to understand the values of academic entrepreneurship and its implications for the changing organisation of academic work (Mahony 1992). It seeks to understand the organisation of work in a sector where previously stable, bureaucratic institutions are being challenged by globalisation, internationalisation, the demand for products and services tailored to individual requirements and the potential to meet those demands via technological change.

METHODS

The data are drawn from an occupational case study of academics in Australian universities using extended case method (Burawoy 1988; 1991). This was one of the hallmarks of the Manchester School of Social Anthropology in the 1950s. Through explanation of the anomaly, extended case method adds value to general models and theories of the labour process. It varies from traditional ethnography in that it does not seek to reject theory or induct new theory, but seeks to find an
anomalous situation highlighting the weakness of current theory to explain, and then seeks to add value to that existing theory.

The study involved the techniques of interview, observation, content analysis of Government publications and documents from university websites (mission statements, strategic plans, general policy documents, etc). Thirty-five interviews were conducted with commentators, and business faculty academics and managers from four public Australian universities. These universities exhibited characteristics of the commercial-industrial model of universities (Warner and Crosthwaite 1995), (having been developed from colleges of advanced education) as opposed to the universitas collegiate model (elite ‘sandstone’ universities), thereby being likely to exhibit customer-focused policies and practices.

**STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The complexity of university teaching and learning processes should be considered in a wider international context of structural adjustment in developed market economies (Smyth 1995; Marginson 1995; Rooney and Hearn 1999). Structural change in higher education is an international phenomenon (Smyth 1991 and 1995; Miller 1995; Baker, Creedy and Johnson 1996; Barnett 1990; Buchbinder and Rajagopal 1996). Neave (1990) observes three phases in all western higher education systems. The first is the government retreat from the welfare state since the early 1980s and the consequent reduction of government funding of higher education. In Australia this coincided with the reduction of national budgetary outlay on higher education from 4.5 per cent to less than 3 per cent (Miller 1991, 41) and led to deterioration in buildings, research equipment, student demand and morale. In the second phase, from the end of the 1980s, public-sector reform initiatives were based on efficiency and effectiveness principles, primed by increasing international competition. In Australia it was marked by government intervention under the post-1983 Labor Government which sought to rationalise the industry and make it relate to the needs of the economy in general, and to the trade deficit in particular. The third phase from the early 1990s saw a decline in public financing of higher education and the advent of more market competition. Coinciding with this period, policy and legislation in Australia led to the abolition of the binary divide between the college of advanced education (polytechnic) and university sectors. This abolition had resulted in mergers, and by 1991 the subsequent reduction of 80 colleges of advanced education and universities to only 35. There was a restructuring of the industry with the establishment of the Australian Research Council (ARC) to distribute public research funding to institutions. The ARC funded applications for grants on a competitive basis and against the background of national priorities. This restructuring brought with
it pressure to change university government from the collegial to the corporate managerial model under the banner of 'accountability' and good public sector management. There was also pressure to find efficiencies and re-evaluate the ways in which educational services were delivered.

Globalisation has framed the restructuring of higher education and educational practices of institutions in terms of educational commodification, production, marketing and consumption. There are various explanations of the emergence of globalisation and its implications for universities (see Scott 1995; Slaughter and Leslie 1997). For example, one view has its foundations in neo-liberal economics, which sees the primary agent of globalisation as the market (Friedman and Leube 1987). It sees the domination of institutional, social and cultural change by economic forces driven by technology. Gains in productivity from technological innovations and enabling patterns of production (and consumption) drive sequential waves of socio-economic change. In the case of the Fordist economy, the technology took the form of electro-mechanics, oil and petrochemicals, and mass production. Replacing it is the post-Fordist economy, where technology has taken the form of microelectronics, new energy sources, information and communications technologies (ICT) and more flexible patterns of production.

A second view offers a dialectical rather than linear perspective—post-Fordism co-existing with rather than replacing Fordism; the primary agents being consumption and capital mobility (Thurow 1985). In such a view it is consumption, popular culture, political power structures and changing employment structures, facilitated by technology, which dominate the mode of production. In post-Fordism the displacement of mass production for flexible specialisation using ICT-based technologies, is a response to consumer demand for non-standard high quality goods. In this context, specialisation lends itself to small and medium-sized entrepreneurial producers (Scott 1995, 106).

A third view applies a radical or neo-Marxist framework and sees the primary agent as social class (Barnett and Cavanagh 1994). In developed market economies, there has been class fragmentation and hedonistic consumerism. This has precipitated changes to the means of production and to the nature of work including diversity in the patterns of work, intensification of the labour process and the concurrent acceleration of production (Scott 1995, 107).

While there is conceptual disagreement between those who promote these three frameworks about the agency – market, consumption or class – as Scott (1995) and Slaughter and Leslie (1997) point out, empirically they have much in common. They share acceptance of the emergence, since the 1980s, of a global market. They agree that globalisation means less public money for social welfare and education and potentially more private money for businesses. Consequently, universities
implemented major changes consequent on the different funding mix and they developed a stronger focus on products and alternative sources of funding. Some, although not all (Currie and Newson 1998; Halsey 1992), hold that these changes have led to greater competitiveness in higher education institutions. Globalisation has induced broad structural change in four major areas of the higher education industry: marketisation and ensuing competition between institutions; changes to higher education consumption patterns; the commodification of education consequent on marketisation; and the administration and management of institutions (managerialism).

i) Higher Education and the Market

The first change is that the sector has been exposed to intensified competition leading to increased marketisation. This can be attributed to the breakdown of market boundaries between providers consequent on the transnational mobility of capital, and in particular, new forms of ICT and transport (Rooney and Hearn 1999). The implication for universities is that instruction is carried across borders, facilitated by the ICT developments and delivered in flexible mode (Cunningham et al. 1998, 2000; Rowan et al. 1997; Marginson 1995). The higher education response has been: first, the implementation of organisational re-engineering at the institutional level, with the redesign of work practices and the shedding of functions seen as non-essential; second, to provide an increased responsiveness to clients' demands for services that are customised and flexible; third, to tailor courses to the workplace, for example, to provide short courses that are industry specific and delivered at least to an extent on-line; and fourth, the development of multi-campus institutions (Cunningham et al. 1998).

ii) The Culture of Consumption

A second change to the economy as a whole including to higher education, is a change in the culture of consumption and consumption patterns (Usher et al. 1997; Scott 1995; Knights et al. 1999a). It is argued that in the postmodern world, the relationship between production and consumption has changed, with consumption replacing production as the major basis of social differentiation in developed market economies (Burrows and Marsh 1992). This raises issues of: the primacy of consumers over producers; the social construction of the customer by management and its implications for a reconfigured labour process; and emotional labour between customer and employee in the service encounter. Universities are no longer merely an economic or even
socialising instrument, but also a way of constituting meaning through consumption. They have become symbols of lifestyle, signifying difference. As a corollary, higher education processes become individualised and reconstituted as a relationship between producer and consumer. This represents an ideological shift where education is governed by consumer orientation and activities geared to consumer satisfaction. It also manifests itself in major structural and cultural changes to conventional university practices and the academic labour process. Higher education is delivered as a service encounter between academics and student customers, facilitated by ICT, which mean that the ‘shop is open 24/7’.

iii) The Commodification of Higher Education

A third change to higher education—associated with the neo-classical view of economics based on the ‘market’ (Bottery 1999, 104)—is the commodity view of education. Commodification of education leads to management and production processes which seek to improve quality as determined by customer satisfaction (Knights et al. 1999a; Rooney and Hearn 1999). Whereas once the value of knowledge lay in its contribution to the pursuit of truth and liberty, the postmodern condition values knowledge according to its ‘performative value’—its ability to be assimilated to information that can be conveyed through ICT then used by the consumer to enhance efficient performance. Knowledge only has value if it is in the form of information which has the potential to bring direct benefit to the consumer (Usher et al. 1997).

What are the implications of ‘performativity’ for the teaching and learning processes? Knowledge is exchanged between educational institutions and consumers on the basis of the performative value it has for consumers. This draws educational institutions into the market, producing and selling knowledge. It also places the consumer, as constructed by management and their perceptions of customer needs and wants, at the centre of organisational strategy and focus. Linked to this is a shift to managerialist performance indicators of efficiency and effectiveness and a general reconfiguration of social relations, including teaching and learning processes. The ‘performativity’ of knowledge as a product, then, is the catalyst for re-evaluation of academic labour’s value and performance.

iv) Managerialism
A fourth change (a significant catalyst in cultural change in universities) is managerialism (Hort 1997). This, together with the changing culture of institutions, has weakened the traditional bureaucracy once driven by professional authority of staff based on their status as gatekeepers to social knowledge. The managerialist approach brings with it new forms of decision-making, which fundamentally ‘undermine(s) a conception of a university as an autonomous self-directing, peer-review and professional-authority based institution, thus changing the politics of how academic work is accomplished’ (Newson 1993, 9). This has major implications for the organisation of work in terms of decision-making and control, with administrators and technocrats assuming roles which were once in the academic domain. And for academic labour, the pre-eminence given by managerialism to the role of the customer will inevitably lead to issues of consumer sovereignty, and the challenge to traditional academic authority.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

A common theme from university managers and academics was that the marketisation of universities, with credentials sold as a commodity, has become an integral feature of higher education. As one vice-chancellor (VC) commented, ‘It would have to be Nirvana to be able to escape and resist the invasion of marketisation’. An example of the common viewpoint from academics was: ‘The acts to commercialise [the university] by senior management are market-driven, driven by students or at least by our perceptions of what students want … we are pandering to perceptions of student needs … there is a large amount of construction of the student-as-customer.’

Universities’ strategic plans manifest the orientation of academic work towards the market. These plans focused on sustaining a culture of service which met the needs of students interested in value and quality. Managers’ incorporation of performance and accountability measures into formal organisational processes, targeting customer satisfaction levels, operationalises the student-customer concept. The incorporation gives legitimacy to customer expectations of service, and also provides the means by which students’ expectations and needs can be met.

University corporate plans include: teaching-related performance targets such as graduate satisfaction levels, which are considered a key performance indicator (KPI) in terms of planning needs as well as a marketing tool; organisational development (OD) interventions to develop service cultures with students as the primary clients or in some cases ‘customers’; the implementation of student-customer surveys of academic teaching performance (with satisfactory performance required to pass probation and promotion hurdles); the establishment of one-stop student centres including call centres (some of which may also collect complaints); the upgrading of student information services with each student having access to intra-nets which incorporate student feedback on service quality; the creation of the student complaints’ officer role; focus groups and
surveys of students’ views of services (possibly leading to an extension of opening hours); and the development of modes of flexible delivery (a pedagogy, a marketing tool and a form of work organisation), based on student choice of access in terms of time and place.

In many universities, KPIs and targets such as student–customer satisfaction have been catalysts for redefining the criteria for academic achievement from those of professional standards as determined by a discipline, to criteria derived from market indicators. The consequence for academics is a reorientation of work organisation towards customer service, and a reframing of the employment relationship to fit with management’s assumptions about customer ‘wants’ for flexibility and value-for-money.

Links between customer focused strategies and processes and the reconstruction of the academic employee was evident in enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) at interviewees’ workplaces. As stated in one agreement, to accommodate the increasing competition for students, declining government funding and the continuing changes in ICT, hours of work had to be changed to meet the changing needs of students. Consequently some of the university’s services were extended to a seven day a week basis. As shown by the EBA at another university, workplace bargaining is a strategic tool linked to corporate objectives, ‘to strengthen its competitiveness and to achieve improvements in productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, quality, flexibility and equity’. The EBA was negotiated on the basis of management’s assumptions about the institution’s strengths and weaknesses, its market position, and the espoused strategies needed to achieve more effectiveness, e.g. customer focus. Flexibility, quality and value-for-money are key components in the provisions of the EBA which calls upon academics to improve their service delivery. When operationalising the new conditions, academics reported that management was specifying the turnaround time on assignments, the maximum response times to student phone and e-mail enquiries. Where academics undertook individual contracts to deliver intensive courses customised for corporate clients, these specific terms could be written into the employment contract.

The congruence of these factors in strongly customer-focused commercial-industrial model universities occurred at the point of intersection between product and labour markets. Production systems in these universities are redesigned according to customer preference which has been legitimised and given effect through TQM which accepts the student–customer's subjective perception of quality as the cornerstone of structural and procedural re-engineering. To this end, interviewees reported a range of organisational processes for systematically monitoring student satisfaction. These included scheduled rounds of focus groups to quantify student attitudes to and expectations of services; annual ‘student experience surveys’ of continuing students and all graduating students; student feedback chatboards run by student administration; a chatboard with the vice-chancellor; student e-mail access directly to vice-chancellors, deans and senior university
TQM is supported by university marketing functions which use the student-as-customer metaphor to divert organisational will and resources into efforts to satisfy customers, coupled with a willingness to alter dimensions of a product or service to satisfy customer needs. To quote from one university’s strategic plan: student-centred, simple and flexible systems which ensure student awareness of, access to and satisfaction with services. As one VC stated: Feedback from students is an ongoing mechanism.

What takes place at the service encounter of teaching reflects the inherent tensions in what has become a market exchange (Marginson 1995; Smyth 1995). One academic commented, ‘It’s just too hard ... learning is seen as a commodity, a purchase to be made and this has really changed academic work.’ Another said, ‘As far as I’m concerned, students express themselves as customers, demanding services through e-mail ... full-fee paying students in particular identify themselves to put pressure on you.’ ‘They tell me: I’m paying for this’... they’re more demanding with a focus on results which they think they are entitled to because they have paid money ... it’s economic rationalism and it has destroyed education ... students see themselves as purchasing services which puts pressure on you over grades, particularly on junior staff.’

Student expectations of service and quality generated by a university’s marketing can be incommensurate with actual resources. In such circumstances there is constant negotiation and conflict between academics and students seeking to exert control over academics’ work to secure their interests. A general theme from academics was summed up by one: ‘Students negotiated over consultation hours which are different from what I’m offering, different break times during the class and different tute rooms, changes to assessment, their workloads, the length of assignments, the marking criteria... they want more time to do assessment ... they want more and more detailed information and to be taken every step of the way ... they want you to be available by phone, fax and e-mail every day and weekends ... they negotiate over grades and marks for assignments, resubmissions ... they will want to negotiate over everything.’

The effort bargain, an aspect of the employment relationship, becomes a negotiation between academics and students, opening a new frontier of control. An academic said: ‘There’s an expression of disrespect and their opinion about value-for-money through walkouts in lectures, coming late or not attending ... it’s rude behaviour and an explicit presumption of students being customers... Walkouts are more prevalent.... There’s an aggressive approach by students over marks, talking in lectures and there have been isolated occurrences of students claiming that lecturers had to comply because they were paying our wages ... consumer behaviour affects you but you become hardened to it.’
In summary, an anomaly of customer control in the employment relationship is evident in both aspects of the relationship (conditions of employment and the organisation of work). Although not homogenous throughout the industry, or across faculties, there are nevertheless pockets in institutions where an intersection occurs between customer service and employee behaviour moderated by managerialist KPIs geared to customer satisfaction. Student-customers become a partner in management’s strategy-making and control systems over academics. This is a major shift in the social relations of the workplace, with its new emphasis on the ‘cult(ure) of the customer’ (du Gay and Salaman 1992).

CONCLUSIONS

The Universities’ shift from an educational to a market orientation has led to a reconfiguration of social relations in academic workplaces. With education as a commodity, the implications are that learning is something to be consumed with pleasure rather than discipline. This is at odds with the modernist view of education where the academic’s role was to maintain the profession’s status and the discipline’s integrity through guardianship of the knowledge (Usher et al 1997). Academics’ traditional authority has been their right to define and judge the meaning and value of their product in terms of their aims and standards rather than those of the customer. In market-oriented universities, the learners’ ‘wants’ potentially take over from what educators have in the past dictated as ‘needs’ representing a significant shift in the balance of power between educator and student, with the potential subjugation of academic authority to the power of the consumer in what has become a market relationship.

This raises questions about the impact of students on academic standards which used to be determined by academics. This research has highlighted that some academics (usually in the 35 plus age group and resistant to the marketisation of the industry) resist pressure from Management and invoke what they see as the higher ideals of ‘discipline’ and ‘profession’ irrespective of the conflict or litigation that may ensue. As identified in the fieldwork, younger academics seem to be more compliant to their management’s customer focus, both through their self-censorship and internalisation of values, in the knowledge that their career is dependent on satisfactory customer ratings and management appraisals. In that employment security and career are linked to customer satisfaction, academics relinquish control over standards and conform to managers’ policies which endorse consumer sovereignty.

As a former Minister for Higher Education said, the Government is trying to get universities to form a ‘new relationship with their employees’ (Andrews 2005:41). He saw: a need for greater flexibility in agreement making rather than compliance with a floor price often determined by the
[academics’ union]; little opportunity to recognise and reward high achievers; long and complex processes to manage under-performance; the need for flexibility in staff arrangements to deliver courses in response to new and changing markets; and the need for flexibility to tailor remuneration packages to individuals (Andrews 2005:41).

One consequence of the ‘changed relationship’ may be the curtailment of academic freedom, albeit an elusive term yet to be afforded a universally accepted definition (Tierney 2001). There are concerns that the mechanisms protecting academics and their security may be dismantled in favour of individual contracts, designed to promote commercial interests of the institution over traditional freedom of speech for academics. Researchers have noted academics’ self-censorship as part of a survival strategy.

Commercial interests of universities (particularly commercial-industrial model institutions) may, in the future, dominate academics’ interests in terms of ‘academic freedom’. This study identifies that academic labour sees these changes as a threat to their autonomy, working conditions and control over the labour process in the market-oriented university, with a deterioration in the attractiveness of the job.

We anticipate a further weakening of academic freedom given the weakened industrial-relations institutions and the strengthening of managerial prerogative under the current neo-liberal federal government. Academic labour has had a tradition of rights and control over the labour process, involvement in decision-making in their workplace, and a culture of responsible autonomy. Custom and practice in an industrial-relations sense, has always been strong. When those integral features of the occupation such as responsible autonomy and academic freedom are eroded, they are replaced with managerially strategies. Such strategies emphasise customer satisfaction and a focus on outputs, changing work organisation to foster greater flexibility and the strengthening of HRM systems with their focus on individuals, career paths and rewards. It follows that awards and EAS become vulnerable. Managers can thereby erode the established employment-relations framework for academic work. It is a process whereby academics are losing their professional autonomy, and control over the labour process. The substitution of managerial prerogative for collegial decision-making, and the imposition of customer focused values on collegial culture are indicators of the weakening of industrial-relations institutions.

With the weakening of these institutions, the organisation of work (the negotiation over tasks to be done, by whom, how and when) becomes more important. Increasingly, university managers want academics to perform at higher levels. One way is through functional flexibility: the reorganisation of work based on the wishes of customers. Another is by designing different workload/productivity measures and targets, reinforced through HRM systems with the focus on
measuring individuals’ Kips and achievements. This fosters competition between academics and facilitates individual employment contracts between individual academics and their employing institution, at the expense of collegiality and collective bargaining. A key focus for academic labour, then, becomes promotion, especially in the less secure environment of contract and limited tenure, for flexibility can also be achieved through numerical flexibility as illustrated by the retrenchments of academics at Newcastle University (Knies and Mullins 2005:14). To focus on promotion, academics will seek to attain the criteria set by HRM systems linked to corporate strategic objectives, including customer focus. The realities of the service encounter, reinforced by individual employment contractual arrangements, mean that labour internalises the values of the student-as-customer as its survival strategy in an occupation which offers less job security and relies more on individual performance and competitiveness. Internalisation, or at least self-censorship, when it comes to management’s customer focus ‘win-win’ strategy is integral to achievement of career goals. We are seeing the labour market more responsive to the forces of supply and demand in the product market, and academics much more responsive to managements’ corporate strategies and their customers’ demands.

These factors create growing pressures on academics. There are changes to the formal conditions of employment, such as working hours and rewards and greater external control imposed by administrators through performance management geared to consumer satisfaction. There are increased demands on academics’ time by students who have access through ICT often resulting in academics being drawn into administrative, formerly at the periphery of academics’ work. There is greater surveillance of academics by students who use ICT as a means of influence or control over labor redacting academics’ autonomy. There is a change in workplace values and orientation driven by managerially, with the subjugation of academic occupational culture to corporate culture. There is also the diminution of academic freedom, be it an outcome of managerial regulation or self-imposed censorship.

So who will be the winners and losers from these changes? For those academics that see their role as gatekeepers to social knowledge with allegiance to a discipline or profession rather than institution, there is a sense of loss of what they perceive as the devaluing of education and their role within it. As one such academic stated: ‘This is not a petrol bowser.’ For those whose orientation is administrative and career focused, rather than collegial and disciplinary, academic capitalism offers a specific commercial context which lends itself to individual employment contracts, performance measures geared to consumer satisfaction linked to rewards and career progression, which may bring substantial financial benefits.
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