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Soin, Kim; Huber, Christian

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Compliance and resistance:

How performance measures make and unmake universities

Kim Soin, SP Jain School of Global Management / University of Winchester

Christian Huber, Copenhagen Business School, chu.om@cbs.dk

Abstract

How individuals comply with, and resist performance measures and metrics can be seen as a key concern in management and organization. Recent literature has advanced our understanding of compliance as a social practice which is often related to resistance. Yet, compliance is seen as something we equate with simply yielding to power without any agency. We address this theme with a study of the effects of managerialism on academic work. More specifically, we investigate the introduction of measures and controls to improve PhD completion times in a research-intensive UK university. Our findings show that despite most of our respondents voicing concerns about the reductionist nature of the target and the consequences for quality, the large majority of academics we talked to complied with the measure. We identify three compliance types that demonstrate compliance is an interpretative process. We make two principal contributions with this paper. First, we offer insights into why compliance deserves analytic attention as a social practice in its own right, as something that goes beyond mere consent. Second, we analyse the impact of managerialism on higher education through the lens of compliance. We use these insights to reflect on how compliance was linked to resistance and the effects of different compliance practices on academic work which ranged from shifting responsibilities to challenging academic integrity.

Key words:

Compliance, Consent, Higher Education, Managerialism, Resistance

Introduction

Discursive shifts towards new public management and the imperatives of providing value for money have been behind the drive to turn universities into more business-like organizations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). Reforms have shifted organizational structures from collegial institutions with flat hierarchies (Birnbaum, 1988) to professionalized management-led institutions (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007). Crucially, many core academic tasks have been made amenable to being managed – the most closely studied examples are intellectual research endeavours which have been redefined in terms of rankings-based journal impact points (Willmott, 2011). Critics argue that this reimagining of academic work as something necessitating management has hollowed out academic freedom (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). Transforming universities into accountable and manageable organizations (Power, Scheytt, Soin, & Sahlin, 2009), has to some extent, changed academic activities. The introduction of professionalized management tools, such as policies, indicators and reports, serve as mechanisms to translate wider discourses into mundane interventions (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996), which then change the work of universities – and those within it (Dearlove, 1998).

Previous research has highlighted a curious paradox: academics mostly reject the changes to their work and the organizations they work in, yet they still comply with the rules and policies which effect these changes. For instance, Kalfa, Wilkinson and Gollan (2017, p. 275) state that “scholars are almost unanimous in their conclusion that academics have largely complied with managerialist imperatives and document ways in which they cope with them”. Similar observations can be found in Espeland & Sauders’s (2007) work on journal rankings: the rankings are unpopular or held to be “stupid” (p. 23), yet academics are continuously reaffirming the power effects of rankings through their compliance with managing the rankings. Similarly, Alvesson & Spicer (2016) find that academics give managers power over them, despite emphasising the detrimental effects of doing so. What unites these studies is that

academic compliance is portrayed as a crucial part of why the instruments of managerialism take hold and maintain their power.

More theoretically speaking, prior literature which discusses compliance with power structures – whose effects are considered detrimental, broadly falls into two categories: On the one hand, there are studies which try to understand why people comply. These often turn towards Foucauldian or Bourdieusian arguments (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Kalfa et al., 2017). On the other, there are those who specifically look at how compliance is linked to resistance, finding a complex set of relations (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017; Carr, 1998; Kamoche, Kannan, & Siebers, 2014; Ybema & Horvers, 2017). Both sets of literature are united by a common underlying assumption: while power structures and resistance are nuanced and complex phenomena, compliance is seen as a more straight-forward acquiescence to power. The common trope seems to be compliance as passive behaviour in which actors show little agency but are pawns in the power game – compliance is merely consent.

The theorization of resistance is, at least in this regard, further advanced than the theorization of compliance. Several scholars have shown that mundane and everyday resistant practices make substantial difference to the effects of power structures (Collinson, 1994; Mumby, 2005; Scott, 1990; Thomas & Davies, 2005). Taking inspiration from such approaches, we ask what kind of practices and behaviours happen within the broader category of compliance and with what effect? Given that following rules and policies entails an element of interpretation (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Ortmann, 2003), we can expect that compliance, like resistance, is actually a complex phenomenon which can take many different empirical forms. Different practices should then have influence on the effects of power structures. Moving towards a kind of “compliance studies” which looks at compliance as a complex social phenomenon in its own right motivates our research question: how do different compliance (and resistance) behaviours impact academic work in the context of the managerialization of higher education?

In this paper, we look at compliance as a situated social practice interwoven into daily life in organizations and its effects on work practices. We do so by presenting the findings of a longitudinal case study undertaken at *Elite* (a pseudonym for a research-intensive UK university). Driven by the concerns of UK research funding bodies, the university set up a four-year completion policy for doctoral theses. Time allocation for academic activities is an interesting example for managerialization. Strathern (1997) has argued that research is dependent on the availability of ostensibly non-productive time which is difficult to fit into the logic of managerial audits (p. 318). Based on a series of interviews (conducted in two stages over three years), documentary analysis and on-site research, we investigated the situated use of compliance with, and resistance to, the introduction of the four-year completion policy.

Our findings show that the four-year completion policy for PhDs was criticised by the majority of academics, yet faced little overt resistance. Instead, we found a variety of compliance behaviours: some actors framed themselves as consenting and generally agreeing to the policy, while the majority actively interpreted the policy in different ways. We categorize these behaviours as disciplinary, responsibility-based, and reputation-based forms of compliance. For each of these categories we found statements about associated resistance practices, which allowed us to examine the relation between the different compliance forms and resistance. We also show how statements about different effects of the policy are linked to the different compliance forms. Thereby, we show what is at stake when actors comply differently: depending on the form of compliance, the four-year PhD completion policy changed the very thing it was trying to measure. The scope of the changes to academic work ranged from shifting responsibilities to challenging academic integrity.

We make two principal contributions with this paper. First, we offer insights into how academics were compliant with the performance measurement of PhD supervision. We propose an understanding of compliance as an important social practice in its own right, and thus go beyond the idea of compliance as mere acquiescence. The three compliance behaviours

identified in our case study provide a rough categorization for different practices, enabling us to develop an empirical-analytical approach for moving towards compliance studies. Second, we analyse how compliance with the policy changed academic work around PhD supervision. We offer a take on how compliance was linked to resistance and the range of effects different compliance practices had on academic work. Through this, we shed light on the worth of studying compliance and add to the critical literature on the workings and effects of managerialism in higher education.

Theoretical Background

The emergence of new forms of organizational control (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Müller, 2016) and the trend towards managerialism (Shepherd, 2018) has renewed scholarly interest into how actors respond to being measured and controlled. The higher education sector can be seen as a case in point: concepts like value for money (Townley, Cooper, & Oakes, 2003) have subjected universities to demands for the accountable and transparent use of public funds. Universities have responded by formalizing their management structures and increasing administrative capacities (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014). Power et al. (2009, p. 306f) highlight the emergence of “a broader set of transformations of universities from being ungovernable and idiosyncratic collections of individuals to being accountable organizations with clear missions, formal structures, [and] professional management”. A key aspect of this has been the introduction of quantitative measurement tools which have featured heavily in the way universities have changed to become more managed organizations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000).

Shepherd (2018) observes that although managerialism has been covered extensively in the higher education literature, there is no single agreed definition of what it ‘is’. Clarke, Gewritz & McLaughlin (2000) describe the “process of putting managerial ideas into practice as managerialization” (Shepherd, 2018, p. 1671). Whitchurch and Gordon (2010) identify six main characteristics of managerialism in the higher education context: (i) greater separation of

academic work and management activity; (ii) increased control and regulation of academic work by managers; (iii) perceived shift in authority from academics to managers and the weakening of the professional status of academics; (iv) an ethos of enterprise and emphasis on income generation (v) government policy focused on universities meeting socio-economic needs; (vi) a market orientation, with increased competition for resources. Measures like target setting and performance management are key devices that have been used. At the institutional level, this includes exercises around teaching quality assessment and research assessment exercises, quality audits, and Research Council (funders of PhDs) intervention taught components in research degrees (Lust, Huber & Junne, 2019; Parker & Jary, 1995). The individual level of performance management includes a focus on publication output, teaching scores received, and grants awarded, as well as PhD submission and completion times. Critics argue that power has been relocated away from a bottom heavy, consensual, collegial democracy of roughly professional equals into the hands of Vice-Chancellors and managers – both professional services and academic, who are increasingly removing themselves from the nature of academic work (Shepherd, 2018). Early in the debate, scholars argued that attempts to re-organise hierarchical structures and academic work by way of managerialism may have had a low success rate with the collegial tradition prevailing. Fifteen to twenty years later, however, some argue that the trend has shifted and academics “have largely complied with managerialist imperatives and document ways in which they cope with them” Kalfa et al. (2017, p. 275). Parker (2014) echoes this highlighting the lack of “collective and successful resistance” (p. 281) at the European Business School where “academics are incapable of preventing their own institutions changing around them” (p. 281).

Research in higher education and management has shown that actors deploy nuanced micro-practices in response to management controls. Teelken (2012) found symbolic compliance, professional pragmatism, and formal instrumentality in Dutch, Swedish and British universities. Studies of resistance to managerialist changes in higher education have often

highlighted that resistance can be subtle (Anderson, 2008; Lucas, 2014; Sapir & Oliver, 2017). Equally, studies have found that compliance is a frequent response to being measured, with most of the literature understanding compliance as simply being the antithesis of resistance (Filippakou, Salter, & Tapper, 2010; Quinn, 2012; Worthington & Hodgson, 2005). In addition, a number of studies have emphasized that ostensible compliance can actually be a form of resistance, for example when it is part of impression management (Anderson, 2008) or symbolic (Teelken, 2012) or only partial (Sapir & Oliver, 2017). The current state of the literature in higher education research and organizational studies is lacking in something we could call “compliance studies”. However, the rich and nuanced literature on resistance has repeatedly touched upon compliance as a social practice – albeit indirectly and usually to understand resistance. We now review two archetypal texts, one “old”, one “new”, to illustrate how compliance has been largely conflated with passive consent and that there is a case to be made for a closer look at compliance as a social phenomenon in its own right.

One such example of this implicit conceptualization of compliance is the seminal labour process theory studies of Collinson (1994). In this text, Collinson summarizes two of his previous empirical studies to illustrate different resistance practices. He finds that when unpopular managerialist changes are introduced, actors (factory workers) responded in one case by distancing themselves from power, and in the other, by persisting with a challenge to management control. In the first case, by distancing themselves from control through their knowledge about work processes, actors managed to remain largely untroubled by control measures and maintained their positive identity, but had little influence on what managers actually did. In the second case, by persisting with an alternative point of view, one actor took an unjust dismissal to court and persevered in the face of intense psychological pressure. When Collinson talks about compliance, he uses the terms compliance and consent interchangeably (p. 29, 37, 58). The linguistic expression is representative of his conceptualization of compliance. While resistance is understood as a nuanced localized practice where worker’s

accounts and interpretations matter (p. 53), compliance is generally understood as the generalized opposite of resistance. In the case of the factory workers who distance themselves from power through elaborate cultural practices, compliance is portrayed as acquiescing to management decisions, such as large redundancies, without unionized response. In the case of the worker who fought gender discrimination through persisting with a counter-narrative, compliance plays little explicit role, but is implied to be the yielding to the psychological pressures exerted by management. Neglecting workers' accounts and interpretations of how they comply is also problematic, given that Collinson goes to some length to discuss whether resistant micro-practices are effective preconditions for collective action (a view strongly advocated by Scott, 1990), or ineffective if it is not directly linked to collective resistance (a view later propagated by Contu (2008) and Fleming & Spicer (2003)). What is left out is the other half of the equation: is effective control dependent on micro-practices of compliance or is compliance also a site for unanticipated subversive effects (a point which Collinson briefly mentions in relation to Kondo, 1990).

Current approaches to the study of compliance and resistance have shifted from a mapping of dynamic micro-practices, to an examination of how exactly compliance and resistance relate to one another. Again, we take an archetypal paper from this debate to illustrate the dominant line of reasoning. We chose the paper by Kalfa et al. (2017) because it explores the ambiguity between compliance and resistance, specifically in relation to the rise of managerialism in higher education. In their case study of a small UK university, they study why academics played the game of performance appraisals through a managerial lens. To understand the relation between compliance and resistance, they draw on Bourdieu's work on the metaphor of the game, whereby actors experience symbolic violence. This is defined "as 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity'." (p. 277). Note that in this definition, actors (agents) are framed in the passive voice, effectively stripping them of agency. Like Collinson, in Kalfa et al.'s empirical analysis, we see complex micro-practices of

resistance, while compliance is depicted as simply following the rules. The problem with this approach is that even “mere” rule-following, as a social practice, requires an act of interpretation (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Ortmann, 2003). The phrase “working by the rules” implies that simply ‘following the rules’ is not enough to give the social controls power. As a consequence of the imbalance in the focus on resistance and compliance, Kalfa et al. (2017) also produce an explanation of the relation between compliance and resistance in which all ambiguity comes from resistant practices and the element of rule-following they entail. While other studies have emphasized that compliance may also entail resistance (Kondo, 1990; Ybema & Horvers, 2017), a thread runs through studies of compliance: resistance may be a complex phenomenon, but compliance is, conceptually and empirically, understood as mere consent in which actors agree to certain controls. In this paper, we set out to challenge this assumption.

In terms of analytically and empirically studying compliance as a social phenomenon in its own right, the existing literature on resistance provides researchers with all the analytical tools they need. Like Collinson and those following his agenda of bringing nuance into studies of resistance (Mumby, 2005; Thomas & Davies, 2005), we see discursive statements and resulting actions as primary sites for understanding how and why actors comply. Such statements need to be understood in their specific localized context and should be unpacked in relation to the social environment in which they are made. The experiences in the “lived moment” (Scott, 1990) are key to understanding why actors do what they do. The accounts of those subject to controls and their interpretations of those controls, as well as their own actions in relation to them, should be the focus of researcher’s attention. In particular, researchers should pay special attention to micro-practices as well as their effects on work and the workers themselves. Such effects may also affect the construction of individual professional identities, which have been argued to be potentially impacted by compliance practices (Boussebaa & Brown, 2016; Carr, 1998). While early studies like Collinson’s have shown that resistance cannot be understood in isolation from what actors resist, later studies like Kalfa et al.’s have

shown that compliance cannot be understood in isolation from resistance and the associated controls. Studying compliance can then only emerge from appreciating the relation between controls, resistance and, compliance.

Our principal aim is to understand how academics react to being measured and controlled as well as how this impacts their work. This concern is theoretically important because it can help advance organizational researchers' understanding of (i) compliance as a social phenomenon in its own right, which goes beyond mere consent, and (ii) the impact of compliance inside organizations. We, therefore, ask the following research question: how do different compliance (and resistance) behaviours impact academic work in the context of the managerialization in higher education?

Methods

Setting

The setting for this study was a large research-intensive institution (*Elite* University) based in the UK. In 2005, *Elite* set up a programme to see how risk was being managed across the university; the idea was to look at ways of developing and improving risk management processes and identify ways of embedding a risk management system. A project team was established, which consisted of two academics who worked in the area of risk management, as well as two doctoral students. One author was part of this team and had access to all academic and administrative areas across the university. The project was overseen by a Steering Committee that consisted of senior managers (both academic and administrative) and reported to an Academic Council via the Internal Audit function. Ethical approval was given by the university for both stages of the research and conducted along the principles of non-harm to research participants, including: informed consent, confidentiality and sight / approval of the transcripts for participants. The findings are reported in a manner that preserves participants' anonymity.

Research Design

The objective of this paper is to analyse how different compliance (and resistance) behaviours impact academic work in the context of the managerialization in higher education. Our research design was therefore concerned with understanding how academics comply with attempts to control their work. As with other studies, this paper is “not an a-subjective [...] writing up of results” (Chua, 1995, p. 113). It is an account of multiple realities of the organizational actors engaged with doctoral education at *Elite*. The main investigator was both an ‘insider and outsider’ (Jönsson & Lukka, 2006) who did not seek to impose his/her views and understandings on the interviewees, but asked open ended questions around the experience, perceptions and feelings around the concepts of risk, uncertainty, performance measures, controls and the objectives of the university. Furthermore, while aspects of the project could be seen as a piece of interventionist research (Jönsson & Lukka, 2006), for example, through risk training in relation to operational risk assessment, no direct interventions were made as a result of the research undertaken for this paper. The accusation of researcher bias, frequently aimed at interpretivist research, or researchers as ‘natives’ i.e. both supervisors and PhD students, was ameliorated with the introduction of another researcher. This additional researcher was never part of the case organization or the UK higher education system, and often acted as a “devil’s advocate”, critiquing and challenging interpretations that might have been somewhat disingenuous (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012).

Data Collection

The research was undertaken in two phases: phase one (March – June 2005) was an exploratory study that sought to map the perceptions of risk management amongst senior managers, including academic and administrative staff. It also sought to examine existing risk

management procedures as they were carried out within the university. 20 interviews were conducted with nine Heads of Schools/Deans and eleven senior administrators in functional departments. The interviews were semi-structured, each lasting around one hour. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

These findings then informed phase two of the study (January – May 2007), in which two key themes were explored: Operational risk assessment (phase 2a), i.e. how risks are identified and assessed, and the link between operational risk and organisational aims. The second aspect, which is the focus of this paper, looked at how internal control was implemented in a higher education institution (phase 2b), with a particular focus on accountability and responsibility for risk management in the chosen areas. Three contrasting areas were observed: PhD regulations, Health and Safety, and Archive and Record Keeping. The topic of PhD regulations, and in particular, the four-year PhD completions policy, was an area that had been cited as a potential risk by a number of phase one interviewees and hence, became the focus of this paper.

Data collection in phase 2b (implementing internal control measures) consisted of 23 semi-structured interviews (ranging from 1-1.5 hours), conducted with administrators, academics, and individuals responsible for developing and implementing the policies in three academic departments within the Schools of Humanities and Sciences. Eighteen of these related to individuals involved with the PhD process. The other five were roles specific to Health and Safety and legal compliance.

We employed multiple data sources beyond interviews. Several informal inquiries continued until 2011 to further trace the effects we had encountered in 2007. This also allowed us to raise questions with prior informants (from both phases) that had arisen in data analysis, and thus provided a further understanding beyond formal interviews. We observed and experienced a number of activities of both academic and administrative staff. These included:

attendance at formal meetings (for example, PhD progress review / upgrades¹; student induction meetings; School and Departmental Research Committee meetings and Graduate School Committee meetings) and attended courses on PhD supervisor training. For ethical reasons, we asked for permission from individuals involved in these conversations to incorporate these discussions into our research. In addition, we accessed *Elite*'s internal documents: the risk management and PhD policies, web-based policy statements and guidance on policy implementation as well as internal emails discussing the various policies. We also analysed publicly accessible material (Higher Education Funding Council for England – HEFCE) regulator guidance, circular letters, and guidance from Research Councils UK.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the empirical data in phase one of the study focused on gaining an understanding of how senior managers at *Elite* made sense of risk management. We organized the empirical material around emerging themes: The risk of not meeting the four-year completion target for PhD degrees was a major theme in phase one of the interviews, so we specifically focused on this topic in the second phase (2b) of the research. The PhD regulatory framework was an area in which significant changes like the introduction of new monitoring mechanisms were already underway and where the university had seemingly succeeded in enforcing new regulatory rules and regulations which aroused our interest in compliance. The data was analyzed in an iterative process, in which all authors reviewed interview transcripts and documentation in order to identify themes that emerged around the complexity of compliance and the resistance contained therein. We were curious to understand the micro practices and day-to-day actions around 'what it means' and 'how it feels' to comply. As part of the interpretive process, the authors had in-

¹ Students at *Elite* are initially registered for an MPhil with the option to upgrade to a PhD if they meet the requirements.

depth discussions around what our respondents were telling us about compliance. We went back to our raw data in order to re-immense ourselves in the contextual details and slowly, a picture started to emerge around the actions associated with compliance, the practices of compliance and micro-resistance and their overall effects. After trying out different ways to categorize our data, we settled on a) the distinction between consent and compliance and b) the different discursive points of reference of compliance practices as the most comprehensive way forward. This enabled us to develop a more conceptual level of interpretation that led to the distinction between consent and compliance and the creation of three themes or ‘compliance categories’ (disciplinary, responsibility and reputation-based).

The context of doctoral education in the UK

In the UK, a PhD is a postgraduate doctoral degree awarded to students who complete an original thesis, which offers a significant contribution to knowledge in their subject. Doctoral work can be undertaken on a full-time basis based at a university or part-time. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is the most common form of doctoral qualification and assessed through examination of a thesis or portfolio based on extended research conducted and an oral examination (viva). The outcomes range from pass, minor or major corrections – that do not normally require another viva, to the resubmission of the full thesis and a second viva. In terms of supervision, although there are variations around the structure of supervisory teams, they usually consist of teams of supervisors that have at least one subject expert in the field.

Supervising PhD students is an important aspect of an academic’s role, so much so, that successful supervision is essential for promotion and career advancement. However, the role of research supervisor is not one that can be easily defined. While there are practical aspects of the role that include things like checking and reviewing progress, setting targets, guiding the student towards a significant intellectual achievement and taking care of any administration like reporting progress to the university, there are other less clearly defined aspects of the role. For

example, organizations like Vitae² suggest supervision might depend on aspects which often vary, such as personality type, level of experience, and university regulations. Supervisors are required to be a combination of mentor, “sparring partner” (Grove, 2015) and supporter with junior academics ‘learning on the job’. Finally, although doctoral candidates are registered as students, the relationship between the supervisor and student is complex. Again, drawing on Vitae, the relationship is neither ‘teacher and pupil’ or ‘colleague’ or indeed, ‘friend’, but more like an ‘advisor’, ‘collaborator’ and/or ‘leader’³ but this varies in practice.

Sector-driven changes in UK PhD policy

The 1950s and 1960s saw a significant expansion of government funded doctoral programmes in the UK with the organization and management of these programmes being left to universities. Things changed from the 1970s onwards, when UK public spending and demands for greater accountability and responsibility for the use of public funds was placed at the forefront of the political agenda. This resulted in increased scrutiny of spending on funded doctoral programmes, which was found to be lacking in a number of areas: there were concerns around low completion rates and long completion times, questions around the purpose of doctoral education, a lack of innovation in PhDs – as well as concerns about accountability and responsibility for public funds (Geiger, 1997; Kendall, 2002; Taylor & Beasley, 2005). This resulted in the creation of measures of performance that demonstrated value-for-money to the government as well as the introduction of a number of new initiatives aimed at producing well-trained and employable doctoral students. To this end, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Research Councils began developing standards of good practice

² Vitae is the global leader in supporting the professional development of researchers.

³ For a detailed overview of supervisory relationships see: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/doing-a-doctorate/starting-a-doctorate/supervision-and-key-relationships>

for postgraduate research degree programmes (HEFCE, M14/96).⁴ The outcome of their deliberations was that there was a need to ensure that postgraduate students had access to supervision of the appropriate standard and that this could be achieved by establishing specific performance measures to determine whether the standard was met (HEFCE, 2000). One such performance measure was the monitoring of completion rates (HEFCE, 2002; Joint Funding Councils, 2002), which was then extended to include completion time (QAA, 2004)⁵ i.e. the number of funded research students who complete their PhD within four-years. This was considered an effective measure of whether the student's research training has been satisfactorily completed. In 2003, further guidance from HEFCE set out a threshold to improve standards in postgraduate research degree programmes (HEFCE, 2003-23). The issues of induction, supervision, progression, and training were all recognised as contributing to the provision of high quality research degree programmes and timely completion. In 2004, some of the Research Councils refined their performance measures – mandating that all PhDs in their disciplinary areas would have to be completed in four-years – not just those they funded. Institutions that did not comply would be subject to sanctions. In the next section, we trace the effects of compliance with the managerialisation of supervision.

Implementation at Elite

At *Elite*, the university's top management reacted to the demand of the Research Councils by introducing a four-year completion policy of PhDs. As we will see later, some of the supervisors we interviewed at *Elite* agreed to the policy, while most were sceptic of the academic value of the policy. Interestingly, *Elite* did perceive its completion rates as relatively high compared to

⁴ This review set in train a further series of reviews and consultations (HEFCE, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005) aimed at improving standards in postgraduate degree programmes.

⁵ The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) had also published a draft revised code of practice for postgraduate research programmes in which it proposed that institutions monitor the success of their postgraduate research degree programmes. The measures suggested for this monitoring included completion times and rates (QAA 2004).

other universities and we did not find evidence of internal demand for such a policy. Rather, the policy was a direct reaction to demands from the Research Councils which had power through their control of funding for PhDs.

The policy had three distinct consequences. First, the number of reports increased (for example, six monthly progress review reports) as did the number of formalized procedures (PhD upgrade and progress monitoring). If timelines around upgrades or meeting completion targets were revised, supervisors were required to provide an explanation or account for their performance and how the situation was being rectified. Second, the university-wide graduate school introduced stricter oversight of progression monitoring procedures – for example by producing comparative information on completion rates across the university to ‘name and shame’ underperforming schools. Completion rates were scrutinised and schools were expected to account for their performance. For example, compliance with the procedures and hitting the four-year target became part of the formal performance measurement for Heads of Departments. Third, depending on the different schools, individual supervisors faced personal consequences. Our respondents reported that some schools stopped academics from future supervisions when their PhD students did not submit on time. This in turn was interpreted as a career risk. We did, however, not interview anybody who had actually faced punishment themselves. Still, how to comply with the policy was a hot topic for all of our respondents.

Taken together, we argue that the policy is an exhibit of managerialism in the sense of Whitchurch and Gordon (2010). Since the university’s management takes over a part of academic life formerly in the hands of academics, at least the first three main characteristics of managerialism are met (greater separation of academic work and management activities; increased control of academic work by managers; perceived shift in authority from academics to managers). Since the policy is a response to external funding demands, there are also elements of the sixth main characteristic (market orientation) evident in the policy. In sum, the policy is an exemplar of the intra-organizational facets of managerialization.

Findings

In our case study of how academics react to the introduction of a four-year completion policy for PhD-theses at *Elite* University, we found different groups of consent and compliance practices. In some of the responses to our questions, actors showed little engagement with the policy beyond general agreement and box-ticking. Based on our reading of the literature, we group these statements in the category of consent. The majority of statements of our respondents, however, related to practices which showed a higher degree of agency and different ways of interpreting the policy and giving it meaning. We group these practices and the ways in which actors made sense of them into three categories, depending on the central point of reference: disciplinary compliance, responsibility-based compliance, and reputation-based compliance. While we did not find organized or large-scale resistance against the policy, we found different micro-practices of resistance which were associated with the varying interpretations of the policy.

Table 1 provides a summary of our evidence and how we categorized it. The rest of this section follows the analytical structure of the table. Specifically, we (i) provide definitions of each form of compliance; (ii) analyse the compliance practices that are in play in each category; (iii) identify acts of micro-resistance that are contained within each category, and (iv) identify the effects of compliance and micro-resistance on the work of PhD supervision.

| | <i>Consent</i> | <i>Disciplinary compliance</i> | <i>Responsibility-based compliance</i> | <i>Reputation-based compliance</i> |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Definition</i> | General agreement with the policy | Interpretation of the policy based on possible sanctions | Interpretation of the policy based on who is responsible in case of failure to meet the target | Interpretation of the policy in relation to its potential impact on one's own reputation and identity |
| <i>Typical practices</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy as a good idea • Just box-ticking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagining consequences • Getting rid of students early | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making students responsible for completion • Project managing students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy intervention |
| <i>Typical micro-resistance</i> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning added value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting responsibility upwards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing the rules |
| <i>Effects</i> | Parts of the process become (more) formalized | Selection of students changes | Style of supervision changes towards micro-management | Heavy intervention in the thesis by the supervisor; potentially challenging academic integrity |

Table 1: *Categorization and examples of findings*

Consent

The first group of statements from our interviews can be summarized under the term consent. In such statements, our respondents stated that they were in general agreement with the policy and therefore followed it. Contrasting with from compliance practices, actors here saw no explicit need to interpret the policy. Rather, actors were concerned with giving reasons for their agreement. We found two reasons for agreeing with the policy, either judging it to be a good idea or seeing it as a box-ticking exercise. In both cases, little further engagement with the policy was deemed necessary beyond following it. Consent is here a more or less straight forward fulfilment of the policy without discernible forms of resistance.

Consent practices

Respondents in the consent category did not give many examples for actively interpreting the 4-year completion policy. In their statements, the policy was portrayed as something which can and should be followed unproblematically. Even when asked about how they complied with the policy in every-day work, discussions quickly shifted towards the reasons for not giving the policy too much attention.

The first reason given for consent was reflected in positive responses to the policy and the perceived benefits of the four-year target. Although none of our respondents reported actively calling for the policy, some saw the positive aspects of the policy. It was justified “as a good thing” and was seen as being in line with the primary academic goals of “high quality research and teaching”, that “increasing submission rates was a good thing” and that it was “wholly positive” in that it produced “successful PhDs” (Head of School 4, Science). Consenting with the policy and the mechanisms that were introduced was not just about meeting the target, but was seen as contributing to a “better learning environment” that was more “supportive” and enhanced student well-being. As one academic commented: “in the past

when the regulations were not there, there were cases in which students were taking six or seven years to submit, and it was not unheard of to have someone never submitting at all because they started to drift and then nothing happened” (Senior Lecturer 2, Humanities).

In terms of the monitoring procedures, the upgrade process was cited as being particularly useful and “more than just ensuring the student will complete in a certain number of years”. It was also seen as “a useful intellectual exercise” (Senior Lecturer 4, Humanities) for students at this stage of their work. Others suggested that finishing within a “reasonable” time frame was good for the students’ employability prospects, as it showed they could complete a significant piece of work on time.

Enthusiasm for the policy was only part of the story. In the second type of justification given for consent, several supervisors said that the new monitoring procedures that “had few consequences”. They justified consent as a “procedural”, “form filling”, and “box ticking” exercise telling their students that “nobody ever looks at it”.

Overall, there was little resistance in this category. Those who were enthusiastic, did not resist. For those who insisted on the policy being a meaningless box-ticking exercise, we might ask if this was a hidden form of micro-resistance. With Collinson (1994) such answers might be considered resistance through distancing, with Scott (1990) it could be considered part of a hidden transcript wide-spread in academia: management tools have no substance and can thus be safely ignored with regard to its consequences on quality. Other scholars, however, have stressed the fallacy of this rhetoric. Fleming & Spicer (2003) see cynical distancing as a form of eliminating the potential for real resistance because feelings of dissatisfaction are pacified without altering one’s practices. In Contu’s (2008) words, the danger is that resistance becomes “decaf” that “threatens and hurts nobody” (p. 370) and “changes very little” (p. 367).

Effects of consent

The actual effects on PhD-supervision of such a rhetoric of consent are difficult to discern. An administrator shared her/his observation: “We have noticed academic staff are better at ensuring the forms are filled in, that has certainly improved in the last year or so, whether it is actually having any effect on the product is a debatable point”. One academic attributed a more substantial consequence when asked about the effects of just sticking to the policy: “I think there is too much fear about failing the student for the upgrade, I mean sometimes we have let students through the upgrade process that perhaps shouldn’t have gone any further”, (Senior Lecturer 1, Humanities).

Constrasting with what we presented in this section, most actors framed themselves as having some degree of agency about how they interpreted the policy. This agency is captured in how they use the policy, and is manifested in three categories: Disciplinary compliance, Responsibility-based compliance, and Reputation-based compliance.

Disciplinary compliance

When our respondents did frame themselves as having some degree of agency when complying with the policy, they chose different points of reference. A first substantial group of statements made by our respondents framed their reactions to the policy with reference to the potential for sanctions that might be imposed if they did not meet the four-year completion target. As we have outlined above most direct consequences of the policy happened at the level of Schools, not individuals. Still, the threat of individual consequences was frequently discussed in our interviews.

Disciplinary compliance practices

Our respondents referred to different compliance practices in relation to the potential sanctions of the policy. We encountered some statements in which academics reported their grumbling compliance. Their general problem with the policy was that it was “not particularly useful” and did little more than “increase workload” because it was a “time-consuming system”. This begged the question, why those academics complied nonetheless. The responses to such questions were often of a defeatist tone:

“I think of a PhD as a complete and finished piece of work and that, I think, is not possible within the limited time frame we now have to work within. That’s not to say that I don’t conform, I have no choice, but I don’t agree with it, and I make that clear to my students and to the Head of the Department.” (Professor 2, Humanities).

Similar to other comments made by academics, the Professor disagrees with the policy and communicates these grumbings through ‘empty posturing’. The tone is very flat because s/he has “no choice”. One academic, again, stated quite flatly: “I would, simply because you get punished.” (Senior Lecturer 6, Science).

It would, however, be an understatement to say that those who framed their compliance in relation to potential punishment had no means to counter-act their exposure to punishment. In this group of statements, interviewees repeatedly mentioned the possibility to avert negative consequences by “putting in extra effort”. A bit more creatively, respondents also reported that they tried to influence student selection to prevent punishments. For example, student selection was connected to monitoring procedures to get rid of underperforming students – while it was still convenient. “The general feeling now is to get the student out before one year has passed, because then it doesn’t count in the statistics, after that it gets harder.” (Senior Lecturer 6, Science).

An academic functioning as admissions tutor – with responsibility for the number and quality of PhD admissions in their department, detailed how formal structures and the perceived personal risk of sanctions impacted student selection:

“According to the regulations we have to accept students with a minimum of [a grade of] 2.1. I just recently had a student who interrupted because he wasn’t up for it, despite having a 2.1, and this is a risk, for me personally, because I’m doing the admissions, it is a difficult judgement, there is the potential risk of not getting the right student.” (Senior Lecturer 2, Humanities).

The consequences of failure were seen as personal – although it might not be the fault of the admissions tutor. However, as the quote above indicates, s/he needs to make a judgement about the qualifications and ability of the potential student they accept in order to fulfil the requirements of the policy. The judgement is framed in terms of the organizational policy namely, the entry requirements and ability to meet the target.

Similar agonising over compliance with the target – and making a judgement about the quality of student to take on – can be seen in the response from another supervisor. This supervisor stated that despite feeling the pressure to take on more PhD students, they are “being very, very careful about who I take on”, in order to ensure they have “some sort of personal quality control of the process” (Senior Lecturer 5, Humanities).

Micro-resistance practices related to disciplinary compliance

Resistance was not a major part of the compliance practices actors described to us. Rather, Foucauldian disciplinary power – in which those subject to control, internalize control to the point that formal controls do not have to be exerted anymore (Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994) seemed common. We did, however, find two types of practices which actors framed as

resistance – at least to some degree. Actors used the reference to sanctions to distance themselves from those accounts which saw the purpose of the policy more positively. The actual impact of such a rhetoric of distance remains questionable. For some departments, the increase in workload meant that they would only oversee compliance for Research Council funded students:

“I am aware that the university would like all students – funded or not – to complete within four years but I just don’t think there is much motivation on the part of this department to oversee those. There is a lot of extra work for both the supervisor and the department so I can see why people think of it as an imposition” (Senior Lecturer, 4 Humanities).

Such micro-resistance can be considered an example of actor’s strategic intelligence in displaying frontstage compliance and backstage resistance (Ybema & Horvers, 2017) – at least in a mild form.

Effects of disciplinary compliance

The effects of this mix between compliance practices and micro-resistance in relation to disciplinary-based compliance are, again, open to multiple interpretations. Potential students were affected through the judgements academics’ made in relation to potential sanctions. However, some academics voiced concerns about the absence of an educational or quality discourse around student selection. Resistance may help those who are not funded by Research Councils but those who are – which were the majority of PhD students at *Elite University* – were subject to those changed framings of the selection processes.

Responsibility-based compliance

A third group of statements about responses to the PhD-completion policy are those in which the interpretation of the policy is based on the question around ‘who is responsible if the four-year target is not met’?

Responsibility-based compliance practices

Supervisors either framed the student or themselves as responsible. The majority of statements seemed to fall into the first category in which supervisors shifted responsibility to students. As one academic put it:

“The supervisory experience must be based on the understanding, both by the supervisor and the supervisee that the clock is ticking now, and how are you going to go from zero to four-years and completion”.

(Head of School 1, Humanities)

Some supervisors focused on making students more explicitly aware of their responsibilities – for example, in accordance with policy manuals and induction processes that explain the responsibilities of students, supervisors, and the university’s departments and schools. One supervisor commented that having this will make “them more adult, more responsible for their work”. (Senior Lecturer 3, Science). S/he perceived this as a good thing for the student, but also helped to ‘bat away’ responsibility from the supervisor to the student.

In some cases, progress review meetings were used as a means to make sure that supervisors could not be ‘blamed’ for something later on and were seen as a formal record of what had been agreed in supervisory meetings. Some academics saw the policy as a reason to “cover your back” and “pass the buck” with the creation of audit trails (Power, 2015). This impacted the style of supervision. As one academic put it:

“I’d prefer a more relaxed style of supervision, but we have to do this to cover our back, so if anything happens and the student complains, we can go back and see how we did things and say this is what my supervision was and you signed, we effectively sign the responsibility over to the student.” (Senior Lecturer 3, Science)

Responsibility-based compliance practices were also evident in the shift to a more project management based approach where supervisors talked about “taking more precautions as to who I supervise and what kind of work this involves” (Senior Lecturer 2, Humanities). Other supervisors were actively managing their portfolio of students in terms of topics that could be undertaken in four-years: “So high risk studies are being avoided” and “you want to find a route where you know someone will finish in four years”. (Senior Lecturer 3, Science). Others viewed the impact on the style of supervision even more drastically:

“One thing I can say for certain is that we are all the time cutting corners, in terms of the quality of the thesis, the work being done etc., because the student is on a very specific timetable ... And this poses a problem in that more and more low-risk, computer based work is being done.” (Senior Lecturer 3, Science)

Micro-resistance practices related to responsibility-based compliance

Responsibility-based compliance practices can also be seen as having aspects of micro-resistance in them, especially when blame is shifted away from the supervisors. How successful such strategies actually were in shielding supervisors from potential sanctions was not clear from our data and did not become much clearer during later visits to the research site. We also found another variation of the theme of responsibility which was more reminiscent of a classical micro-practice of resistance: bouncing responsibility back to management. Some

academics stated that although they were aware that they had to conduct upgrades, they had not seen any formal guidance around this procedure at departmental level; they were also unaware that any formal supervisor training was available. In effect, the responsibility was shifted back up by saying: “I would love to comply, but I haven’t had any guidelines”. Others commented that they had just “picked things up as they went along” and that some informal mentoring from experienced supervisors would be more helpful than formal training.

Effects of responsibility-based compliance

The effects of responsibility-based compliance were most closely associated with responsiblizing the PhD-students. However, responsibility was also a central point of reference with regard to the supervisor’s role and some supervisors spoke of sharing responsibility with the student – as opposed to just cascading it down to them. Further effects of all these responsibility-based compliance and resistance practices were especially noticeable with regard to the style of supervision, which, at least in some cases, became more focused on micro-managing PhD-students and producing additional documentation. Some supervisors saw themselves as very much in the driving seat when it came to meeting the target – operating in a very ‘hands on’ project manager style: “my job is to make sure they design a plan that is doable in four-years and then the student is responsible for carrying it out, with my help” (Senior Lecturer 2, Humanities). The irony of responsibility-based compliance was that it had aspects of resistance – academics tried to shield themselves from potential consequences – but the prism of responsibility ensured that the policy became powerful. Responsibility-based compliance had a tendency to reinforce the policy because ‘everyone is responsible for meeting the target’. The policy did not state where – or with whom responsibility sat if the target is not met (e.g. School, department supervisor or student). Supervisors interpreted the policy and

gave it meaning. By focusing responsibility on themselves and/or the student to meet the target, they gave the policy power.

Reputation-based compliance

The final group of statements concerning how our respondents reacted to the policy relates to the academics' own reputation and interests. In short, actors asked themselves: what does it mean for my reputation when things go wrong? And how can I make completely sure things do not damage my reputation? This link between the four-year completion policy and academics' identities led to some of the most extreme measures our respondents reported. At the most extreme, concerns over reputation and identity overruled academic integrity and honesty.

Reputation-based compliance practices

Reputation served as a reason for heavy intervention in a PhD-thesis. The framing of such actions not about supervision or the potential loss of access to funding, but the fear of not being promoted or losing career opportunities. One of the more drastic statements in our interviews came from one supervisor who rather explicitly put reputational concerns over values of academic integrity.

"The thing is if my students don't complete on time, then my reputation as a supervisor will be damaged. I might not be allowed to supervise, and my chances of promotion will go down the toilet. In one case, I restructured the entire thesis and practically re-wrote parts for the student." (Senior Lecturer 5, Humanities)

Based on a fear of not being allowed to supervise, some supervisors were actively intervening in the PhD.

Less extreme, but more common, reputation-based compliance was evident in a more interventionist style of supervision than we had previously observed. This took also the form of gaming the system. Again, concerns for reputation overwrote values such as honesty. Some supervisors said that they were engaged in subversive activities around ‘playing’ or ‘gaming’ the rules contained within the policy – for example by letting their students submit an incomplete piece of work namely, something that was of a good enough standard to warrant corrections. As one academic explained in both an anxious and relieved tone:

“One of my students needed more time. It was all there, but s/he had simply run out of time. We couldn’t get an extension, and so we had no choice but to submit – it was in both our interests, and I pinned my hopes on a strong performance in the viva [oral examination] and that [s/he] was asked to do corrections within one year. It worked out. Thank God! The final thesis was very good. It was quite stressful though. But I tell you what, at least I know that I can ‘buy some more time’ - if I have to...” (Senior Lecturer 4, Humanities)

The pressures on both the student and supervisor, and the supervisor’s feelings, are expressed in a range of actions and emotions that range from a degree of desperation and ‘taking a chance that things will work out’, to a palpable sense of relief when it does – as well as a more upbeat realisation that there is a way to ‘beat’ or ‘play’ the system.

Micro-resistance practices related to reputation-based compliance

In contrast to this – and in the only real example of non-compliance which our respondents told us – open resistance occurred when the stakes are high for the individual reputation of the supervisor, but the consequences for the student or indeed, the PhD, were of lesser concern.

“...in extreme cases we allow somebody to submit [the PhD-thesis] after four-years, but that’s really an exception. On the other hand, it is important for the student to submit the thesis within four-years and the thesis being of good quality, because it is not good for somebody to submit within four-years and then the examiners find that this is not good work, because this is detrimental, this is catastrophic for the supervisor. So, it is much better for somebody to exceed a little the four-years and submit a good quality thesis, rather than examiners to say that this is rubbish, because this really destroys the reputation of the individual lecturer, and the morale of the student plummets also.”

(Senior Lecturer 3, Science)

The boundary between compliance and resistance becomes most complex in the reputation-based category of compliance practices. Gaming and playing the rules could well qualify as forms of micro-resistance in which knowledgeable actors play the system to distance themselves from its effects (Collinson, 1994). We may even speak of a type of hidden transcript (Scott, 1990) in the organization which was accessible to actors to retain frontstage compliance (Ybema & Horvers, 2017). The practices, however, all have a curious way of reinforcing the policy. The policy became the ‘given’ and reputation was connected to it through such actions. Even in this almost text-book form of micro-resistance, compliance was the eventual outcome of nearly all practices.

Effects of reputation-based compliance

The effects of reputation-based compliance practices in some instances undermined the autonomy of PhD-students as they were based on heavy intervention. Supervisors employed a range of tactics and legitimations to protect their reputation – in terms of meeting the target,

with some supervisors intervening more heavily in relation to the quality of the thesis. We suggest that this form of compliance was especially powerful because reputation as a frame of reference is intimately linked to (professional) identities. When academics related the policy to themselves, their careers, in short their academic identity, the means to protect oneself from the policy got more extreme. This had the potential for significant detrimental effects on quality, as academic values such as honesty and integrity were deemed subordinate to protecting one's reputation. We also heard some statements that the quality had actually declined in the eyes of some academics. One supervisor stated: "Some of the recent external examining I've done, the PhDs have been crap." (Head of School 2, Humanities).

Discussion

The global shift towards universities as more regulated and fully managed organizations (Power et al., 2009), has affected the everyday working lives of many academics. The UK is an exemplar for this development which has led to academic work being perceived in need of professionalized controls (Deem et al., 2007), notably in the form of quantified measurement tools (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). Against this background – and in common with our own observations – past studies (e.g., Kalfa et al., 2017) have made a surprising observation: despite the potential consequences and the frequent unpopularity of managerial controls, academics rarely resist in any overt way. This has motivated us to unpack what actually happens when actors comply with controls.

Our analysis shows that actors complied in four principal ways, each with its distinct relation to resistance and effects. Some actors framed their reactions to the introduction of a four-year completion policy for PhDs as general agreement. We called this type of behaviour 'consent' and found that it related to discourses about the value of the policy and about box-ticking. In contrast, most academics framed themselves as having some degree of agency in

the interpretation of the policy. We grouped them into three categories, based on the central point of reference of their statements: disciplinary compliance practices related to the potential consequences of failing to meet the policy. In addition to increased workload, actors reported that they changed their approaches to selecting PhD-students. Responsibility-based compliance was mainly concerned with whom to hold to account, which led to shifting responsibility from the supervisor to the student or towards management. These practices also led to micro-management in the supervision process. Finally, reputation-based compliance was driven by supervisors' concerns for their career and involved heavy-handed intervention and attempts to game the system, at the most extreme overwriting academic honesty and integrity.

Our findings challenge an implicit assumption in the literature about how actors react to being controlled. Namely that compliance is merely acquiescence and equates to yielding to power without agency. Effectively, compliance has been theorized as consent. Seminal studies (Collinson, 1994; Mumby, 2005; Thomas & Davies, 2005) have shown that resistance can take many forms and have a wide range of implications. We argue that compliance is a nuanced social practice in its own right that has largely been ignored due to (i) the traditional focus on resistance in organizational studies and (ii) actors framing themselves as consenting, attributing little agency to themselves. Our analysis illustrates that consent, when actors invest little or no effort in interpreting a control, is the exception rather than the norm. The bulk of our analysis shows that actors engaged in substantially different and complex compliance practices which related to different points of reference. Disciplinary compliance related to ideas about the effects of sanctions and punishments, as discussed in Foucauldian scholarship (Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994); responsibility-based compliance related to accountability regimes widespread in the UK public sector (Moran, 2003); and reputation-based compliance related to discourses about individualized reputational risks (Power et al., 2009) and identity concerns (Boussebaa & Brown, 2016; Carr, 1998). As such, understanding compliance as a social

practice in its own right can connect those studies which explore why managerial controls are so powerful over individuals (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Shepherd, 2018) with those which have explored how actors resist (Thomas & Davies, 2005).

While classical studies, such as Kondo (1990), established that compliance can have unintended resistant effects, more recent studies have explored the relation between compliance and resistance in more detail. Again, we offer a corrective to the over-emphasis on resistance in those studies. In contrast with the findings in prior literature, we did not find a dialectic of front or backstage compliance and resistance (Ybema & Horvers, 2017) or references to a game being played (Kalfa et al., 2017). Actors in our study engaged in a heterogeneous set of acts of micro-resistance which can be best understood through the ways in which actors tried to comply with the controls. Actors who grudgingly complied engaged in some discursive resistance, questioning the value added by the policy, but since there was no action taken, this points towards decaf resistance (Contu, 2008). However, even when actors framed themselves as having some interpretive agency, they were not necessarily actively challenging the policy either. Our analysis shows that attributing oneself with agency when complying is not a sufficient condition for more active resistance. More counter-intuitively, we argue that compliance is a necessary condition for any form of resistance (other than leaving the organization), as some degree of rule-following will be unavoidable for actors to remain part of an organization – even when they seek to resist.

Our case study is concerned with a relatively specific aspect of academic life: the duration of a PhD. Research has studied other aspects of academic life, such as rankings or the publishing “game”, more extensively with potentially greater claims for generalizability for the entirety of higher education. Our more small-scale research offers something different here, as the influence of managerialism here is not one which systematically changed how research output is assessed (Teelken, 2012; Willmott, 2011) or how academics faced their entire

institution changing (Parker, 2014). Still, as Strathern (1997) has argued, the allocation of time is an exemplar of the clashes between the logic of academic research and the logic of quantitative evaluation. Our case is marked by the absence of a clear master-discourse of large scale changes. Reading our case, one might wonder why academics have not kept faith with the traditions of doctoral supervision? The answer is relatively simple: aside from the question of completion time, managers did not explicitly pitch the policy changes against the traditions of doctoral supervision and supervisors themselves did not talk about the effects on the traditions of doctoral supervision. It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the importance of mundane managerial interventions.

We argue that what makes our analysis pertinent is the mundane and everyday nature of a managerialist intervention and the responses it prompted. Much of the managerialism is actually likely to play out through a myriad of mundane interventions. In fact, in the absence of grandiose discourses about the revision of academic values, we might better appreciate how everyday compliance and resistance play out. Like most other organizational policies, the completion target for PhDs was never likely to prompt orchestrated resistance in the forms of strikes or the like. However, we have seen examples of re-structuring and re-writing parts of theses and other examples of heavy-handed intervention. Compliance with mundane managerial interventions, at least in these most extreme cases, challenged academic values of honesty and integrity. We explain this rather extreme consequence by academics framing of the policy as an identity concern. The price of ignoring the policy and adhering to academic values was jeopardizing one's career and professional identity. Such extreme concerns show why studying compliance matters. We propose that our analytical approach and findings form the building blocks of a kind of "compliance studies". We use inverted commas for the term because as prior literature suggests, compliance cannot be understood in isolation from the power structures actors comply with, and the acts of micro-resistance against the power

structures. If we start understanding compliance as more than mere acquiescence but as a complex, interpretative process in its own right, researchers can follow a basic three-step process to study compliance. First, researchers should ask how exactly actors comply. We found much heterogeneity related to different discursive anchors. Yet in principle, many more factors may influence the variations compliance practices may take, and the literature would benefit from a more systematic engagement, as has already been done with respect to resistance (e.g., Anderson, 2008). Second, researchers should ask which (micro-)practices of resistance are connected to compliance practices. An especially interesting sub-question could focus on the extent to which compliance-based resistance is defiant resistance (Contu, 2008) or a nucleus for more overt resistance (Scott, 1990). This would result in a third step, in which researchers can map and theorize the relation between compliance and resistance. While we already have insights into some possibilities as to how this connection can play out (Bristow et al., 2017; Kamoche et al., 2014; Ybema & Horvers, 2017), approaching the relation through the prism of compliance could both develop our initial findings further and bring insights to the wider literature on how actors respond to managerialism.

Conclusion

The mega trend of the professionalized management-led university (Deem et al., 2007) has been around for a while now. Our analysis sheds further light on this topic from the perspective of compliance and resistance and in particular, contributes to our understanding of the role and effects of compliance with measures. Our findings suggest that compliance with performance measures can take many forms. In all forms of compliance, the questions around what is good supervision, a good PhD, and a good university (for example, in terms of reputation with funders) was at stake. By measuring what is 'good' and 'bad', the academics in our case aligned

their behaviour in one way or another and this complicity meant that academics were driving the changes more than they realised.

By drilling down to the organizational level and analysing the actions and interactions of different actors and organizational structures, we flesh out how compliance plays out in the organization and how higher education policy changes have led to changes to doctoral training. The different forms of compliance and their impact on PhDs illustrate that multiple structures within the organization are affected by reactions to performance measures in different ways. In our case, this altered the distribution and relevance of PhD education. Our findings question the sensibility of technocratic rules and suggest that in this metrics driven environment, we need to understand how academics comply with measures, how compliance with measures might change the terms under which academics make decisions and how they might potentially change what is rendered transparent.

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