

Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Management Learning*

The Performative University - 'Targets and Terror' in Academia: Implications for Learning in Business and Management Contexts

Deadline for submissions: March 01, 2019

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For some six decades, the old Soviet Union maintained an economic system of central production targets for all state enterprises, combined with harsh punitive forms of accountability for those hapless directors who did not meet targets, a system aptly characterized as 'targets and terror' (Bevan and Hood, 2006; Nove, 1958). While this system in its crude totalitarian forms went down in history with the demise of Soviet communism in general (Service, 1998), some more subtle and lighter forms of 'targets and terror' surprisingly reappeared with the advent in many national settings of the neo-liberal policy doctrines of 'Reinventing Government' and 'New Public Management'. Moreover, within public sector organizations, including universities, the notion that they should be more 'business-like' predominates, focusing on managing performance and building accountability, often on the basis of imposed quantitative financial targets (Clegg, 2015; Diefenbach, 2009; Holman, 2000). Within this rapidly shifting management arena, business and management schools - and the research, teaching and management learning which they seek to develop - have been increasingly expected to interface directly with, and make a return from, the commercial environment. Consequently, they have found themselves very much on the 'front-line' of the resultant battles and challenges prompted by heightened managerialism and marketization (Koris, Örténblad and Ojala, 2017; Way et al., 2017). This commercial push has been compounded by the ensuing endemic rise of government cutbacks - especially within advanced economies - legitimated by a neo-liberal penchant for competition and semi-markets. Universities have been increasingly forced to compete with each other for external funds (Wigger and Buch-Hansen, 2013). This has led to an increasing commercialization of university teaching and research, catering to 'business' interest in 'commodified' students and research (Willmott, 1995; Wood, 2017).

Under these new policy doctrines, the 'targets' have resurfaced in the form of quantitative performance metrics and measurement and management systems which reduce academic teaching, learning and research to 'scores' in student surveys, and abstract publication 'points' in journal ranking systems (Adler and Harzing, 2009; Burrows, 2012; Craig et al., 2014; Hussain, 2015; Mingers and Willmott, 2013). It has also led to forms of performance evaluation and accountability that have become more judgmental and punitive, rather than developmental and supportive, thus intensifying employee anxiety and defensiveness (Kallio et al., 2016; Ter Bogt and Scapens, 2012; Visser, 2016).

Potently, much of even notionally ‘free’ or voluntary professional work conducted by academics, for example, journal reviewing, is now nevertheless ranked and monitored. Within such an increasingly politically charged environment, even old forms of propaganda have returned, flooding business and management schools and also university campuses and websites generally with posters, banners and proclamations extolling the virtues and accomplishments of the ‘corporate university’ and ‘commercial business school’ (Geppert and Hollinshead, 2017; Huzzard, Benner and Kärreman, 2017; Parker, 2014).

The ‘terror’ has resurfaced in more subtle forms in the demise of older, more collegial forms of university administration and its replacement by authoritarian, top-down management, through ‘professional’ managers who have little or no connection or affinity with academic teaching and research (Chandler et al., 2002; Parker, 2014). Such transformations have been experienced across a range of global and national higher education sectors (Muller-Camen and Salzgeber, 2005). It has led to divisions among university staff between ‘regime sweethearts,’ ‘silent collaborators,’ ‘pragmatist survivors’ and a small ‘active resistance,’ and also to a concomitant closed, anxious and defensive working climate (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016, Butler and Spoelstra, 2012, 2014; Teelken, 2012). This anxiety has been exasperated by an increasing precariousness of university work, in which low-paid, high-stress temporary staff appointments gradually have replaced existing tenured staff positions and in which academic identities become insecure and fragile (Knights and Clarke, 2014; Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015).

Admittedly, not all universities in all parts of the world are equally affected by such ‘targets and terror’ developments, thus giving scope for a range of variegated analyses and cross-cultural studies in order to deepen understanding in this area. Also, the experience of particular faculties in relation to ‘targets and terror’ within overall university contexts is also diverse - merely by way of one illustration, the situation appears perhaps most alarming in many United Kingdom business schools, kindred with emergent conditions in business schools and faculties in the rest of the Anglo-Saxon world. However, even in wider European and international settings, many schools and faculties are beginning to exhibit varying aspects in relation to the above-mentioned trends (Craig et al., 2014; Geppert and Hollinshead, 2017; Parker, 2014; Teelken, 2012).

At this juncture, it seems pertinent to take stock of, and seek to, critically challenge the extant and emerging ‘rules of the game’ within the university environment (Bristow, Robinson and Ratle, 2017). Even more crucially, it is vital to identify the acts, spaces, processes and mechanisms which could provide a response and alternatives to the seemingly inexorable rise of managerialism, commodification and marketization in varying HE national contexts (Harland et al., 2015). Given the challenges above we pose the following questions: what lessons can be gleaned and what management learning can be carried forward to generate new models and approaches together with tactical and strategic answers and solutions? In the face of the rise of the narrative of the ‘corporate university’ and its increasing annexation of academic life through ‘targets and terror’ approaches, what alternative narratives may exist to situate better the future of universities as places of learning? How might alternative understandings of the role of universities within societies impact on the learning within these institutions, from academics, managers and students alike? In this context, what is the relationship between individual agency, from an academic, student or management perspective and structure, with respect to the institution, sector and state, within this management learning process? How do business schools, as key exemplars of ‘targets and terror’ environments provide important insights and cautionary lessons for wider faculties and departments? This also brings to

mind the question of whether such agency only really offers a form of ‘decaffeinated’, escapist respite (Contu, 2012), or whether certain forms of individual and collective learning lead to a structural contestation? Furthermore, how could other disciplines and perspectives offer new ways of exploring this challenge. For example, Jones (2017) draws on environmental psychology, to understand the impact of how a group of academics across disciplines, institutions and levels are contesting academic work, by drawing on their aesthetic, temporal and spatial sensibility.

In this Special Issue we invite submissions from colleagues from business and management schools and universities generally, and indeed wider observers and commentators to reflect on and write further research on these developments. The Special Issue particularly wishes to generate responses, solutions and learning with which to address the above issues and provide responses and alternative ways to move forwards for business schools but also university settings in general. We are open to a wide array of methods and forms in which such reflection and research may be represented, from personal narratives to qualitative and quantitative research methods. Furthermore, we welcome a wide array of perspectives on this reflection and research, including contributions from, for example, business, management, accounting, sociology, economics, anthropology, philosophy, public administration, political science, among others.

What next? In the spirit of development of new approaches, learning and responses we suggest possible themes for contributions include (but are not confined to):

- Power, ideology and control in the new ‘corporate university’ – mechanisms and processes of ‘targets and terror’ cultures;
- Particular national and cross-cultural accounts and narratives of the corporatisation, commodification and marketization of HE
- Resistance, collaboration and pragmatic survival - against a backdrop of ‘targets and terror’ - towards the engagement with, and conduct of, learning in contemporary business and management schools and wider academia;
- The micro-emancipatory potential and limits of academic agency, critical performativity and creative resistance to contest HE managerialistic ‘targets and terror’;
- Possibilities of liminal counter- spacing: moving beyond academic complicity;
- The relationship between individual and collective academic responses to managerialism and identification of the new relationships which may emerge;
- Quantifying academic teaching, learning and research in business schools and universities generally: antecedents and consequences;
- Performance management and evaluation of learning in business and management schools and universities;
- Race to the bottom: competition and precariousness in academia;
- Responses, resistance and development of new models and approaches for operating universities and business schools which might facilitate alternatives to ‘targets and terror’ – how might business school specialist knowledge assist in these regards;
- Image building and the ‘new propaganda’ in universities – implications for learning;
- The future of New Public Management approaches in university settings – to what extent are more supportive, humanistic and relational atmospheres and processes possible?

Submission guidance

To discuss your article prior to submission, please contact the special issue editors: Max Visser m.visser@fm.ru.nl, Anders Örténblad anders.r.ortenblad@nord.no, David R. Jones

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This call is open and competitive; manuscripts will be double-blind reviewed and a limited number of papers will be selected by the guest editors for publication in the special issue. Submissions must fit with the aims and scope of *Management Learning*: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/management-learning#description> as well as with this special issue call. All submissions should be made online: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/management_learning in accordance with the journal submission guidelines.

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