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A critical analysis of university change

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Knowledge management strategy

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Lars Bo Henriksen

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Knowledge management Strategy - A critical analysis of university change

Lars Bo Henriksen

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Knowledge management strategy in a university department - *Analysing a plan for change*

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INTRODUCTION

Everybody was there. Deans, heads of departments, people responsible for the education, people responsible for research, all respected academics with titles and positions. They were presented visions and missions and they were baffled. Yes, we are going to make the best research, yes, we are going to make the best candidates and yes, we want to make the best university in the world. But ... but, but how on earth are we going to do that on the present budget and with still more

budget cuts in the years to come. This caused the frustration. Most of the noble people assembled saw the ambitious visions, missions and strategies as nothing but a travesty - words on paper, wishful thinking, never going to materialise. Just another one of those costly and time consuming management shenanigans – annoying, but not changing anything – a complete waste of time.

Frustration is definitely the word. The distance between the strategy and the everyday life in the departments were worlds apart and the conflicting demands put on staff did not do much to ease the situation, the frustration. While frustration among staff was a key word, so was transition. Transition from a relatively stable, calm and very academic institution with classical academic ambitions to a much more marked orientated provider of knowledge to the outside world. This transition is seen at universities all over the world so there is nothing particular new in this. Our university may even be better suited for this part of the transition than most, as a typical nineteen seventies red brick university, based on PBL-principles¹, it has always had strong connections to the local communities and to the local business environment in particular. It was not this part of the transition that caused the frustration, but the very obvious gap between means and ends and the new management principles that followed the transition. The transition had, to some extent at least, impact on the daily routines especially on the level of middle management and especially the fact that middle managers was no longer elected among staff but was to be appointed by the over all management caused concern. But first and foremost the constant budget cuts, the diminishing time for research, the increasing teaching load and the ever growing bureaucracy caused the frustration.

The transition and the frustration is why the strategy is important. And the main concern and interest for the following analysis of a strategy plan as a knowledge management exercise; would it be possible for the new strategy to solve the problems of transition and frustration. The analysis includes a short description of the background, of the old organisation, the new organisation and the transition itself. The analysis will be conducted along the lines of the theory of reality as described in Henriksen et.al. (2004). The theory of reality is concerned with transition in organisations and with the realities that constitute the changing organisation.

TRANSITION: FROM IVORY TOWER TO THE KNOWLEDGE FACTORY

It is a well established fact that western universities have changed during resents years (Lyotard 1979, Fink et.al. 2003, Leitner 2004). The ivory tower is no longer left alone, interested parties are still louder claiming their moneys worth; “when we invest in universities what do we get for our money?” Jobless candidates and esoteric research that is of interest to only a small minority and totally un-sellable on the market is no longer tolerated.

Most continental universities are based on a Humboltian tradition emphasising free research, freedom in teaching, unity - that is all topics are represented at the university, unity between teaching and research and self government (Fink et.al. 2003). In addition to these conditions we could add a generous funding by the government. This could be the old regime. In the new regime, after the transition and therefore not fully achieved yet, the basic conditions of the university are changed as well as the basic idea of what a university is. The generous public funding has, if not disappeared, then diminished compared to the number of students put through the university system. Instead the university is expected to seek private funding in specific research projects and in government granted research programmes, programmes with a specific aim. This run parallel with the post-modern condition as described by Lyotard (1979), the marketisation of knowledge production - “Be commensurable or disappear”. In this understanding of the university and its role in society the concept of truth has changed as well. In the Humboltian tradition truth and truth seeking was part of a larger idea of the good of mankind enhanced by research. The truth was a

truth aiming at making a better future. In the new regime this is changed as well. The overall judge is in any case the market. The sellable knowledge is the true knowledge and while truth was important in the old regime it has lost significance in the new regime. This has consequences for research and teaching as what sells becomes more important than the freedom of the researcher and the educations are no longer a privilege for the chosen few, but become a commodity sold on a market.

REALITY OF THE RESEARCHERS

The starting point is the frustrations of the staff and the transition. The frustration is well documented in research and in the press (Dalsgaard 1990, Langberg & Lauridsen 2001, Baldursson 2005) and it is quite obvious in everyday life of the university. The frustrations are reflected in the (rather sad) jokes told by staff. Jokes like “In the old days the researchers evaluated the students – now the students are evaluating the researchers”. “Why be a researcher when you can be his boss” (with reference to the bureaucrats). “Do the university have an administration, or does the administration have a university?”. “In the administration they are singeing “Stick close to your desks and never go to sea, And you all may be rulers of the Queen's Navee!”ⁱⁱ. This is perhaps not a fine display if intellectual with, but telling when it comes to the state of affairs in the departments.

The frustration has many sources. First of all the transition itself is frustrating. But so was the old regime, even if some in a nostalgic moment long for the good old days with its tranquil stillness. But that was also a world of academic smear, intrigues, and nepotism, not necessarily something to long for. The old regime was not able to avoid the Marxist excesses in the 1970'es and the lowering of academic standards in the 1980'es. The transition itself produces insecurity, it produces new alliances and it produces new problems for the researchers. Finally there are the parts of the new regime that the researchers dislike, especially the parts that are seen as unnecessary bureaucratisation of work and the ever increasing number of administrative staffⁱⁱⁱ. Common to all sources of frustration are their background in the budgets. The ever increased teaching load, the new requirements in fundraising and the increased bureaucratisation of work modes, especially evaluations, are all paralleled by cuts in budgets. So, it might be hard to see whether the frustrations stems from the old regime, the new regime, from the changes or from the lack of funds. Some of the frustrations have always existed, some are new and some are based in the fact that some researchers do not like to teach at all and some teachers do not like to do research. No matter what, the frustrations are there and it could be expected a brand new strategic plan would do something about it.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

If the frustration is the problem, and there is quite good indications that it is, and the transition is an important challenge to the organisation, then we could ask if the strategic plan hold at least some of the answers to the challenges. Will it remove the frustration and aid the transition, making the department able to meet the future challenges and fulfil its goals.

The strategic plan is really just some 12 pages divided into ten sections – each section describing a specific topic to be touched upon in the plan.

First section is called introduction. In this section there is a short description of the overall reasons for the plan. The main reason is stated to be input to the overall university strategy we saw presented in the beginning of this paper. Second the purpose is stated to be internal discussions on how to meet future challenges.

Section two is a short description of an expected future development in the relevant surroundings important to the university. These trends in future development are increased competition for research funding and students, increased emphasis on visible results and funding on basis of these results and increased cooperation with private sector organisations.

Section three describes the over all goals of the department and the basis that the department should build upon in the future. This basis is described as a classical European Humboltian university tradition. Free research, research based education, freedom, respect, debate and ethics. The goals of the department are almost the same as described in the Danish university law; research and educations of high international standard. Here it is also added that the Humboltian tradition must be respected and it is explicitly mentioned that “creativity and a critical attitude towards research, society and established truths” is necessary. Finally it is stated that the achievements of the department are to be measured against international standards.

Section four describes the financing of the department’s activities. Today most of the departments funding stems from government funding of teaching and some grants for basic research. According to the strategic plan it is foreseeable that this will change in the future, so competition for finances will increase as well as a stronger emphasis on the relation between the department’s production and its finances in a much more marked oriented system.

Section five is concerned with research, both present and future. A short introduction declares that research is a creative process that is taking place in a necessary research community or research group; therefore each researcher must be attached to a research community in the future. This research community is the guiding principle for the rest of this section. Each group will have a research manager appointed and each research community will be given a certain status as either “research centre”, “established research group” or “upcoming research group”. Each group will report its progress in terms of research activities, external research projects, number of finished Ph.D.s, publications etc. and resources will be allocated accordingly. Each research group will be placed in a management hierarchy so the manager of each group is referring to the department management. The department management will then decide which groups can be granted centre status and receive additional resources.

In section five there is put a strong emphasis on evaluation of research results, bench marking and control. This is continued in section six describing the educations. It is foreseen that an increased competition and marketisation of the “education market” as it is called, will lead to the increased emphasis on evaluation and control. Therefore the department should start this process now.

The rest of this section then describes the present status of the education responsibilities undertaken by the department. Section seven sums up the plan.

SOME INTERPRETATIONS

There are several possible interpretations of this. It is quite obvious that the strategic plan is not a strategic plan. From the point of view of even the most basic text book on strategy and management this would not qualify as a strategic plan. Its flaws and its shortcomings are far too obvious. It would simply not be possible to run even the smallest of schools according to the guidelines of the plan. We could say that if the plan had been organised in accordance with a so-called swot analysis, then it would not consider the organisations own strengths and weaknesses, but only look to external threats – opportunities and possibilities are neglected. This leaves us with a plan that is trying to adapt to supposed future threads, trying to figure out where future funding is coming from and then introduce measures these future sponsors are expected to demand. Whilst neglecting internal strengths and weaknesses and possibilities, this can hardly be said to be a very ambitious or

even realistic plan. There is no internal coherence in the plan either; the intended goals are contradictory to the resources, there is no logical connection between the intended goals and the proposed management tools (evaluation) and there is no way the new organisation structure can ever support the described basis for the future work of department (Hierarchy in knowledge organisations). And, finally, there is nothing in the plan that can point to a possible solution to the problem with frustrated staff (Because internal strengths and weaknesses are never considered – just adaptations to external threads).

The plan describes the basis of the department and the future goals in terms of a classic Humboltian university (section 3). Free research, close connection between research and teaching etc. But this is difficult when based on funding from external research programmes. Funding of universities through larger research programmes will inevitably also influence the teaching and education at the universities. As granted research programmes becomes more and more important, resources (senior staff) are drawn from teaching and the idea of a close connection between research and teaching is left behind. Instead research and teaching are separated – teachers do no research as they are mostly temporary staff without tenure and researchers do not teach as they are busy working on their projects. As teaching is evaluated separately - each course is evaluated separately and often evaluated according to its immediate usability - the modularisation of courses is often seen as a solution. This, of course, makes it impossible to attain a high level of progression in the teaching, but that hardly matters in this atomised system, as long as the student's evaluations are positive. This is also why the students are evaluating the teachers and not the other way around as in the old regime. This can hardly be a way of securing high academic standards. So, the expected future funding of the department will work against the intended goals of the department. It is not possible to uphold the ideals of Humboltian university on the basis of privately funded research programmes and a modularised education system.

The only management tool that is proposed in order to realise the future goals of the department is control of output. Evaluation as it is called. It is doubtful though, if it is possible to evaluate the department towards the intended goals. (See below for a more critical analysis of evaluations).

Changing organisational structures is sometimes an efficient, effective and even necessary action to take when trying to improve organisational performance. But in this instance it seems to be a rather hasty and risky action to take. The flat, open and democratic management structure of the old regime is very well in accordance with the goals of a Humboltian university. This structure definitely has its malfunctions (can I use that word here, Dave?) among them a very slow decision process and the risk of nepotism, but it is very doubtful whether a new hierarchical top-down management style will work in a knowledge creating organisation. In any case it will not be able to work in accordance with the overall goals of the strategic plan, as it emphasised openness, freedom and a very flat and democratic structure. Therefore the proposed new organisational structure is not able to fulfil the goals as they are described in the plan. On the other hand the new structure is very well in accordance with the rest of the plan with its emphasis on control of staff, resource allocation and centralised decision making.

PART CONCLUSION

The plan had the goal to preserve the department as part of a Humboltian university. This is said to be achieved in a changing environment where the organisation is forced to legitimise itself in a new and much more visible and measurable way. This is of course contradictory. The new demands for visibility, the new management system and the new organisation structure will all inevitably change the university from the old Humboltian regime to a new post-modern regime. Thereby it is not

possible to reach the goal with the proposed means. Secondly there is nothing in the plan that points to a solution of the problems that staffs are experiencing. The frustrations are likely to increase, as part of the reasons for the frustrations are the hierarchisation and bureaucratisation of the university. This tendency will only be accelerated with the new plan. So, if the plan is so bad why then consider analysing it? Because it is interesting for a lot of other reasons: It is a symptom of something else, a case of knowledge management gone wrong.

THE THEORY OF REALITY - THE PLAN IN ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

It is not a good plan, as we have seen above, this, however does not mean it is uninteresting. It is very interesting indeed. It is a document that is part of the transition of the university and as a document it is interesting because it is able to show us something about the reality behind the transition process. So, from the perspective of the theory of reality (Henriksen et.al. 2004) even a poor plan can show us something of interest.

In this perspective we are concerned with reality. Reality is our awareness of, knowledge of the world we live in and the realities that guide us in this world. This reality is also known as world view or horizon. There is an important difference between reality and world. The world is all the physical things surrounding us. Reality is our knowledge of the world and realities. The distinction between world and reality is not at dualism. Realities are part of the world and the world is important to realities. According to the theory of reality, realities can be described in four dimensions; logic, facts, values and communication. Looking at the strategic plan from this perspective it is quite obvious that the plan communicates some values and is trying to promote a certain logic and some supposed facts. So, the task for the following analysis will be to describe the world according to the strategic plan or to describe the reality of the plan; what are facts, what logic should lead us the goals and what kind of values lies behind the plan.

Facts

Facts are necessary in order to get to know about the world and realities we live in – consequently also about a university department. Unfortunately we are all too often left with only illusions, abstractions and myths. However, facts are necessary if we want to understand the transition in the university department and facts are necessary if we want to know about the frustration. According to the plan evaluations of research output is the way to get to know about the status of the department and consequently evaluations is the way to get facts about the department. Evaluations, it seems, are recoding and communicating facts. This is where the naivety comes in. This conception of facts describes facts as something that exists out there and can be recorded in an objective and precise manner. When this recording is done properly we got true facts about the status of the department. This is of course a very misleading and even dangerous strategy, when gaining facts about the department. Evaluations are a very popular method used in present day management. Especially in the public sector evaluations has found its place in what is sometimes known as New Public Management (Hood 1991, Greve 2002, Leitner 2004). As in the case of the university department, evaluations are thought to establish facts about the present state of affairs and are thought to be a trustworthy, objective and very good way of doing this.

The evaluations have their shortcomings though and the critique is well known. Here I will just concentrate on a few of the problems with evaluations. Evaluations are often presented as neutral, almost value free and almost costless in the sense that the gains far exceed the cost of performing the evaluations. This is a necessary myth used to legitimise the use of evaluations. But evaluations

are costly and they are affecting the evaluated – in our case a university department. Evaluations are a costly way of establishing facts detracting resources from other much more important tasks, e.g. research and teaching. This is not a problem in a system of plenty, but this is certainly not the case here. Another problem is the fact that evaluations are not neutral; they are affecting the work of the evaluated. This is the case because the idea of evaluation as presented in the plan is based on a naïve conception of facts and the way facts about the world and realities are established. This is a naïve realist conception describing facts as something that is out there just waiting to be collected. This is of course not the case. Facts are always established on the basis of negotiations, power struggles and conflict. What should be counted as facts are subject for debate and what should count as facts in the department are not necessarily the same for staff and for management. Therefore it is not likely that staff will accept the facts that the evaluations produce and present as facts. Instead the evaluations will only contribute to the frustrations as instead of producing facts are producing abstractions, myths and illusions about the department and the everyday life in the department. From the point of view of the theory of reality, facts are necessary in order to get to know about the world and the realities, but facts are still a result of a construction process and established facts are then themselves constitutive of the realities. In the case of evaluations this explains why the evaluations themselves are a constitutive part of the realities of the department. Or in more simple terms; we get what we evaluate. If the evaluations count articles, then articles are produced and other aspects of the life in the department are neglected. No more books, no more education development etc. The evaluations are then, because they are constitutive of reality, a very forceful tool in the hands of the evaluators as they, through their choice of facts, are able to constitute the realities they would like to see. This is not likely to produce the desired results as the evaluations cannot cover the many faceted obligations of a Humboltian university department.

This critique, however, may even be too sophisticated, as we do not necessarily need a theory to show the uselessness of the evaluations. We need facts in order to know about the department but evaluations are not necessarily the best way of doing this. If the managers do not have the facts about the organisation from their everyday experiences in the organisation, working together with the staff, then it is not likely any evaluation – no matter how value free and neutral they might be – will be able to establish any trustworthy facts. In that case it is maybe new managers with eyes and ears open and the ability to get into dialogue with staff that is needed. Not more costly and unnecessary evaluations.

Logic

Logics show us the workings of the world and of realities. Logics show us future possibilities and it is obvious that the strategic plan has an inherent logic as a strategic plan exactly is dealing with what we would like to see happen in the future. This is maybe one of the main problems as the plan presents several conflicting logics and therefore also confuses the reader on what possibilities there are for the future of the department. In section three we are told that the goals of the department are to further develop the old regime, to develop the traditional Humboltian ideas of a university. The logic in this we could call an enlightenment logic. That is a logic emphasising the good of mankind in a bright future. The university has a role to play in this. This role is searching the truth and counter superstition, myths and false consciousness and give these truths to mankind in order for mankind to emancipate himself. This also explains the freedom of research, the self government of the university and the generous government funding. This logic emphasises the grand narrative of modernity and the emancipation is best achieved if the university is left alone. In the strategic plan, however, there is another logic that is even more prominent. We could call that a post-modern logic

or a market logic. This logic does not see emancipation as its main goal. Instead of the grand narrative of modernity the market has replaced the bright future as the ultimate judge. That is any activity undertaken by the university should be evaluated according to its value in the market. Research and education are what they are compared to other research and other education in the market. That is why the plan places such strong emphasis on competition. Competition for student in the education market as it is called in the plan. There is also competition for research funding, but there is though no research market, maybe because it would then sound like there was some truth to be bought? But competition on markets is definitely the future. This brings in a new logic. A market logic and this was why we had to be “commensurable or disappear” (Lyotard 1979).

With the market logic we also see a new way of organising work, a new division of labour and a new type of management. That is a transition from a professional bureaucracy to a machine bureaucracy and this is what the transition of the university is all about. The professional bureaucracy is characterised by a large amount of autonomy to the staff in managing their own work. That is part of the professional reality that professionals are able to plan, execute and monitor their own work and in this conception of the professional's work it is not possible to separate the planning, the execution and the monitoring. In order to become a professional one has to be educated. This is evident in the career path of the university researcher; Ph.D. student, assistant professor, associate professor and full professor. This is also securing the quality of the university's output as each step of the career is followed by an evaluation of the work of the applicants. This principle is very much in accordance with the old regime, the logic and the whole idea of the Humboldtian University and also of the professional bureaucracy. With the new market logic this is likely to change. The quality control is clearly changed from control of input of staff to control of research and education output. This is one of the characteristics of a machine bureaucracy. In the plan this is followed by a proposal of a new type of management alien to the professional bureaucracy but very familiar to the machine bureaucracy. That is the division of labour that stresses the separation of planning, executions and monitoring of work. In the plan it is emphasised that planning is done by the department management and the management of the new centres and research groups. It is equally clear that future monitoring is to be performed by outside evaluators and by the management. This in particular is a break away from the realities of the professional. In order to be a true professional one is able to handle the whole process of planning, execution and monitoring of the work process. This is a unity that cannot be separated and this unity is forming the reality of the professional – the identity of the professional. But the unity is broken in the new regime and will disturb the image that the professional have of themselves and their own work – their reality. The same thing is the case with quality control. The legitimacy of the professional is attained by climbing the career ladder. The evaluation between the different steps is what secures the quality of the university and it gives the professional their identity as university staff. When quality control is removed from the career ladder to output control, as characteristic of the machine bureaucracy, this is another violation of the professional's realities. “Why should ignorant bureaucrats control us – we were controlled when we were hired for this position. They know nothing - we are the ones that know”, the professional would argue. This change in logic could therefore be seen as part of the reasons for frustrations. The transition process is trying to introduce a new type of logic that alters and thereby threatens the existing realities of the staff.

Values

Values are an important part of any reality. Values are showing us right and wrong. Values are also showing us what we would like to see happen in the future and give us reasons to pursue future

goals. Therefore a strategic plan holds values as well, as it is concerned with the future. As with logic there is a conflict of values in the plan. Again the values of the old regime are in stark contrast to the values of the new regime. Whilst the old regime emphasis freedom, free research and self government and see these elements as necessary conditions for the university, as well as for the emancipation of mankind, these same elements are seen as an obstacle to knowledge production by the new regime. In the reality of the new regime the so-called freedom and the self government is seen as the reasons for failure, a serious case of mis-management. Instead management, evaluations, competition and programmed research are the means to achieve success in the market place. This new value system is to a large extent borrowed from a myth about private sector efficiency, but one only has to be able to read the word Enron in order to see it is only a myth. None the less it has been proposed that if only public sector organisations adopted values and work modes based on Taylorist principles then they would be just as effective as the private phantom. The Taylorist machine bureaucracy is a system with separation of planning, execution and monitoring and the emphasis on control and the values of the Taylorist system is thought to secure the efficiency of the university if copied here as well. The efficiency of the Taylorist system is a myth none the less, as there is no reason to believe that the values of Taylorist machine bureaucracy are very successful in the private sector, either. On the contrary these values are often questioned by students of industrial production and private sector organisations in general (Bendix (1956), Galbraith (1971), Mintzberg (1991)). When industrial enterprises grew still larger it was thought necessary to hire middle management to replace the former manager owners. These new managers needed to legitimise their power differently than the manager owners. Therefore scientific management came in handy, as it provided middle managers with tools to fight the autonomy of skilled workers. Through de-skilling of the workforce it was possible to create a powerbase for the new management. The de-skilling was achieved through the separation of the work processes in planning, operations and monitoring, and by controlling the planning and monitoring processes the new middle management had a strong powerbase. This was also a precondition for Fordist mass production, easily outperforming craft principles on quantity, but not on quality. But the Taylorist principles are not establishing a very friendly working environment for the core of the production and have lead to serious criticism, perhaps this criticism is best described in Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Piece work, conveyer belts, hard division of work tasks, monotony, etc. are criticised when applied in the private sector and it is indeed questionable whether these same principles are applicable in the public sector, let alone as knowledge management at the university. The sole value of Taylorism is efficiency and it is highly questionable if it is possible to use this one value as a guiding principle for a knowledge organisation with multiple goals as the university department. Again the new values introduced are violating the realities of staff and are therefore likely to cause the frustration.

Communication

Communication is a necessary part of reality. Else we would know very little about the realities of interest. In the case of the plan it is a piece of paper communicated as a plan – which is not, it is something else, but according to the plan itself it is a plan. Simultaneously the plan presents itself as a start of a debate about the future strategy of the department. Rather strange as most of the proposals in the plan are presented as external necessities that the department can do nothing about but to conform to these external requirements - little room for debate there.

It is fairly easy to show that there is a change of discourse in the plan. The old regime is granted its say in section three, in an almost archetypical, Humboltian statement - truth, freedom, critique.

“The work of the department is based upon the union between the sciences, that characterises a university within the European university tradition”

“The department wants to develop science and critically contribute to increased knowledge independent of the present perceptions in science and in society in general. Therefore we need to create conditions that will enhance creativity and a critical stance towards points of view that within science and within the rest of society are taken for established truths”

But the discourse of the rest of the plan will eventually bring the reader back to the real world, when we read:

“The finances of the department is expected in the future to be even more dependent on the activities of the department”

The new discourse is promoting certain values, logics and facts, a new reality. This is however not done directly, but the actors behind the external threats are concealed in the language used. In section three we see that the department is the actor, as in the sentence “The department wants ...”. Researchers, employees and the management are bundled in the term the department. This gives the impression that the real actors are concealed somewhere. This tendency to conceal is even more evident in the rest of the plan. Here a passive syntax is used to conceal the actors behind the demands from outside.

“... some employees are not connected to any research group. This will not be tolerated in the future^{iv}”

This is rather strange as we thereby never get to know who is putting these demands on the department. Is it the bureaucrats, the market, private sector organisations, the ministry of research? We do not get to know and the passive syntax is used to conceal, maybe because they *are* unknown? The use of the future as where this is going to happen only strengthen this impression, as unknown actors somewhere in an unknown future are not a very precise description of a seemingly very strong actor.

When it comes to the actual actions taken the plan is more explicit. Here the actor is the new strong management.

“All managers must secure that each individual employee report once a year all activities in relation to research, teaching, and knowledge sharing. The managers are responsible for this individual research watch”

“As a point of departure the quality of the research is secured through the self-control of the research community. With the new conditions for the university this control among colleagues is not enough. First of all the demands for documentation of the research efforts are increased. Therefore thorough, individual research watch are necessary. Secondly, evaluations and bench markings is demanded.”

Here again we see the passive syntax is used when pointing to the supposed threads, like the demands mentioned above. Who is demanding? We never get to know and this leaves staff in a strange situation, because they do not know who is behind the apparently inescapable demands.

The plan's inner contradictions are communicated in the language used and it seems that the freedom from section three is replaced by threats and intimidations, though concealed by the use of passive syntax - definitely a change in discourse. It is quite clear though, that the discourse of the new regime has acquired supremacy over the discourse of the old regime. Any university researcher trying to argue with the importance of freedom of research, the benefits of self management and the value of an independent and critical instance in society called a university will immediately be met by evaluations, budgets, value for money arguments. If not ridiculed, intimidated and hardly being able to claim any legitimacy in the debate – disqualified for romanticism.

Following the proposed changes in facts, logics and values the plan uses a language that is in accordance with these changes. That is instead of the discourse of the old regime used in section three; freedom, critique, self government etc. the rest of the plan is using the discourse of the new regime; evaluations, management, etc. Therefore the language of the plan is reflecting the desired change from the old regime to the new regime. And maybe that was the main goal of the plan. The goal was not only to point to future goals and to actions aiming at these goals, but to introduce a new discourse. This discourse with its new facts, values and logics is presented as an unavoidable necessity that the university can do nothing about but to conform to new management principles. This is not what we normally would understand as a strategic plan, but it could be a very efficient way of promoting changes – the transition - through the introduction of a new discourse and present the changes as necessary and unavoidable. This also points to the possibility that the strategic plan is promoting a new discourse as part of a power struggle between interested parties fighting for control of the university. It is obvious that in the old regime the professional staff is the most important group. The Humboltian principles and the professional bureaucracy secure this group autonomy and secure the management positions to be occupied by the staff. The new regime is going to change that. The new discourse with the new logic, the new values and a new type of facts will let new groups into the management positions. The administration, from local all the way up to the ministry of research, private sector companies, and politicians of all kinds suddenly becomes important players in this new regime - much to the annoyance of the professionals.

CONCLUSIONS

It is quite clear that the plan – as a strategy for a university department is not a very good plan. It is too contradictory with too many conflicting aspects internal to the plan. It is interesting though as it is showing us a document that is part of the transition process and the conflicts of the transition is written into the document, in the language and even in the syntax.

Taken for granted the plan will not be able to aid the transition let alone do anything to remove the frustrations. It seems that the plan is a defiant reaction to a renewed interest from outside. Something like “Evil forces from outside are going to hurt us – therefore we might as well hurt our selves”. Consequently the plan will not be able to contribute anything to the transition process. Instead the plan should be seen as part of a power struggle where different interest groups fight for control of the university. The plan will not do anything to remove the frustration. On the contrary. Instead the plan will only increase the frustrations as it is presenting a reality that is a contrast to the self-image that the staff has of itself. The researchers cannot recognise themselves in this. With the separation of planning, execution and control the professional staff feel attacked right on their professional integrity and what they see as their professionalism is questioned. The plan has no

answer to the scarce resources problem that led to the frustration in the first place, the plan promises more competition for still scarcer resources. The plan suggests setting up consultancies and selling research to a market – this is hardly a way to go for university researchers.

The transition could be interpreted as a conflict between two realities struggling for supremacy, representing different facts, logics and values, communicated in different ways.

From the reality of the new regime the transition is seen as a necessary change made in order to optimise the use of scarce resources. The university is in this perspective old fashioned, under managed and ignorant to the needs of a society in a globalised economy. It is an ivory tower too inwardly concerned with itself. The university needs a wakeup call, so it can take its place in society and start producing the knowledge necessary for the nation's competitiveness in the global market place. We need a fast track from research to profit. This is the reason for the change and in order to change we need marketisation, hierarchy and clear and measurable goals. This change needs a new language, a new discourse to communicate this change and the new reality. And equally important we need to get rid of the old language and discourse with all its silly nonsense about freedom, self government and a truth for the benefit of all mankind. No one ever grew rich on that.

From the reality of the old regime, from the point of view of the professional staff of the university *this* is utter nonsense. The marketisation, the hierarchy, the evaluations etc. will not only make life intolerable but will eventually change the whole idea of the university. The marketisation will lead to research where the truth is bought by interested parties. The evaluations will mean uninteresting research made for the sake of the evaluation and not for the sake of truth and the close connection between research and teaching will be breached as both research and education are bought and sold. And the evaluations themselves are only means of power used to intimidate those who will not conform to new realities. The university will also be changed in a way where focus is changed from research staff to administration in a way where the main players of the university are those parts of staff planning and monitoring the process and leaving the actual production of research and education to a group of de-skilled researchers with little influence on the work processes. This is seen, not only as a problem for output, as it is likely to produce uninteresting research only for the sake of being evaluated, but is violating the whole idea of the university as well as the self image of the researcher. Simultaneously, this will eventually lead to the university be taken over by a group of bureaucrats with only little or no knowledge of research. They will most likely not be researchers (have acquired a Ph.D.) and they will be able to make decisions in areas they have no or only little knowledge of. This is, according to the professionals, the end of the university as we knew it and the beginning of something else – a rather primitive knowledge factory, or consultancy where people and organisations with money can buy the truth and thereby legitimisation for whatever reason they might have.

So, there is indeed a conflict between the two different ways of conceptualising the university. The plan is reflecting this conflict even if it is not a plan and even if it is a severe case of knowledge mis-management. The composition and the language of the plan are reflecting the conflict and as long as such fundamental discrepancies among realities are written into the plan it is not going to aid any change process. From the perspective of the theory of reality we see that the complex reality of the old regime is being replaced by a new reality that is a much more simple character. That is the new regime will only allow one logic (a neo-Taylorist market logic), one set of values (efficiency) and one type of facts (established by the management through evaluations). This reality is communicated from management to the employees and it is communicated as an unavoidable necessity.

There is however no reason to believe that this strategy will ever reach the intended goals. In order to reach the goals the department management should confront the interested parties and their

demands instead of making these interested parties into a phantom concealed even in the language used. With a direct confrontation and with a dialogue with the professional staff chances of a successful transition are higher. This could produce a new reality better suited for the new demands and for the very noble goals of the department mentioned in the plan. Because there are no reasons for the university researchers to long for a glorious past as it is not going to come back. There are no reasons to conform to the rather ridiculous management shenanigans proposed in the plan either. It is clear, though, that the department need a new discourse that is able to counter the very dominant discourse of neo-Taylorism and the somewhat romantic discourse of the old regime. Instead the professional should integrate their own logics, facts and values into a new reality and a new discourse, able to participate on equal terms in the power struggle for control of the university in general and their own department in particular. Nostalgia, frustration or even ignorance of management will not help in the present situation. Other means are needed, e.g. making their own plan reflecting the reality they would like to work with.

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Notes

ⁱ Problem Based Learning

ⁱⁱ "Sir Joseph Porter's Song" Pinafore, Gilbert & Sullivan

ⁱⁱⁱ At this university more than 50% in recent years.

^{iv} The Danish original is even weaker. "Den går ikke i fremtiden" literally translated "that is not going in the future" – a very concealed but still a strong thread.