LEADING CHANGE - THE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF THE 5PS

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Abstract

There are many drivers for institutional change in higher education. Even the most venerable and successful of institutions are subject to market forces, politics, reputational issues, demographic shifts, and fluctuations in the economy. While constant change may not guarantee success, responsiveness, willingness to adapt, and the ability to foresee the need to stay ahead will help institutions withstand the vicissitudes of the world that shapes the groves of the academe.

Agility and adaptability are perhaps even more important for newer, smaller, potentially more vulnerable institutions. One of the defining features of universities is the generation of ideas. What is however not universal in the sector is the mechanism to evaluate these ideas and manage change.

This paper introduces a mechanism for rapid and wholesale change that has proved to be effective in a university. The theoretical spur came from a piece of research commissioned by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (Olivier 2014, What are universities for, LFHE). The framework was then refined through work published in Times Higher Education (Olivier 2015, THE no. 2223) and put into practice at Abertay University.

In a very short period of time we embarked on profound change to our academic curriculum and to our delivery of teaching and learning. At the same time we engaged in a programme of upgrading our use of learning technology, and started improving our estate. External validation of improvements was soon apparent in terms of league table improvements and other recognition.

Before embarking on the change management process we agreed a theoretical and practical framework. This has evolved to become the 5Ps. Each policy or practice change at the University is subject to this process, whereby changes are subject to scrutiny in terms of Purpose; Participation; Principles; Practice; and Pace. In short, a proposer has to briefly articulate why a project is important; who will be involved (including, crucially, practitioners or deliverers); what the underlying principles or values are; what the day to day delivery will entail; and what the urgency is. Importantly, if a practice is found to contradict a principle or value, the practice needs to change.

The presentation, and the ensuing linked ones, will explore the 5Ps in more detail, drawing on actual examples, and will include explication how our change management programme seeks to avoid pitfalls of large-scale change management projects, such as unintended consequences.

Keywords: Leadership; Change Management; Framework.