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## Perceptions of change in university enhancement by Cath Caldwell

This study examined the perceptions of enhancement initiatives and examined data from a variety of stakeholders at different levels on the same course.

MA Academic Practice in Art, Design and Communication

# The aim was to look beyond large institutional theories into the effect of change on the individual.

Marshall (2016) compares different change initiatives in academic and leadership management methods. She compared didactic top down and co-design

bottom up management methods.

Millard and Hargreaves (2013) looked at teaching and learning funding. They found that **funding alone did not necessarily bring lasting change**, although the offer of **priority for funding did have an impact.** Underspend was 'inevitable'.

#### Gap in literature: between two viewpoints about perceptions of change on the individual

The objective was to gain knowledge about preparations for change initiatives and consider the staff experience of change: (Knight and Trowler, 2014).

Aims of the research:

• to investigate the reactions and apprehension that staff experience (Millard and Hargreaves, 2013);

• to consider feelings around challenges to change by particularly in the contestation period, observed by Gosling and Turner (2014)

• to **discover themes** to improve preparing for enhancement by listening carefully to

narrative stories (Geetz1973) .

### **Ethics**

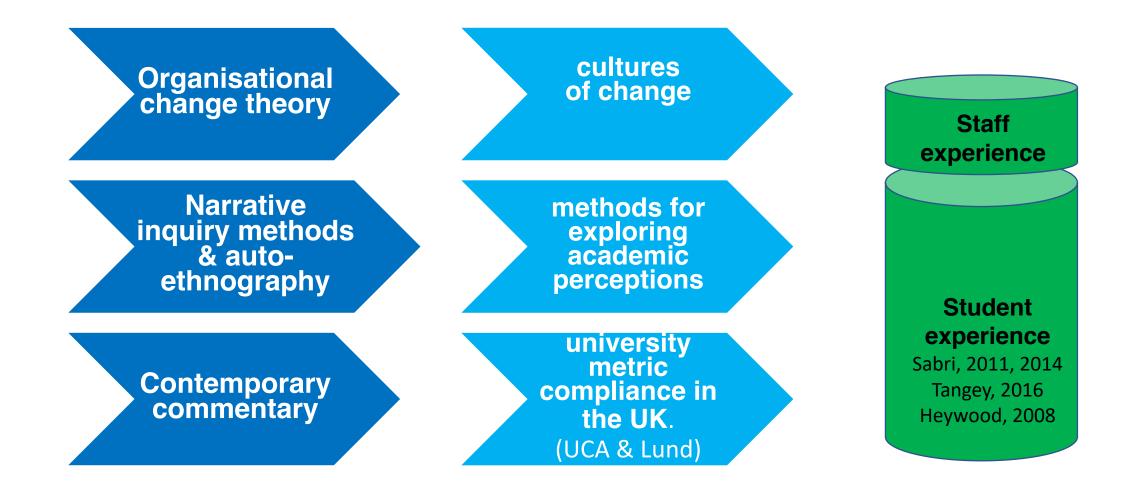
- Data was anonymized
- Identities protected
- Statements were not traceable.
- Participants given a description in advance
- Sufficient time for questions
- BERA guidelines followed

#### Figure 1 Attributed personas and relational structure

Job titles and gender were removed to protect confidentiality and anonymise interviewees.

| Assumed persona | Position in structure   | Management of initiative   | Reporting structure   |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| Taylor          | Senior<br>management<br>(Macro)<br>Working in university<br>and senior school<br>management.<br>Manages a cluster of<br>Programmes of<br>different courses. | Responsible for those<br>who are in leadership<br>positions. Some<br>strategic involvement in<br>planning for the<br>school/faculty.               | Taylor reports to the Dean<br>of College<br>This role involves<br>implementing university<br>initiatives as required. |
| Robin           | Junior<br>management<br>(Macro/meso)<br>Working in college<br>management team,<br>managing a cluster of<br>PG and UG courses.<br>Junior management.         | Responsible for the<br>academic leadership<br>and management of the<br>course teams. In<br>addition is key tutor<br>group leader in final<br>year. | Robin reports to Taylor<br>This role involves<br>implementing university<br>initiatives as required                   |
| Lee             | Team Leader<br>(Meso)<br>Team leader working<br>at 'senior lecturer'<br>level to implement<br>teaching strategies   | Responsible for subject leadership.  | Lee reports to Robin<br>Has a number of direct<br>reports and manages<br>hourly paid staff.                           |
| Yati            | Part Time Year<br>tutor (Micro)<br>A member of<br>teaching team   | Works three days a week and has own creative practice.   | Yati reports to Lee and<br>Robin. No management<br>responsibilities   |

### What did the literature review reveal?



### Sampling

- One of 33 possible courses was selected
- Stable course team was chosen to provide data over six months
- No prior experience of this course to avoid threat of validity or insider bias (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

### Scope

- Four participants chosen for interview as a sufficient sample to give a good representation of stakeholders (Trowler, 2008).
- Research phase and writing spanned one year.

### **Two research questions**

What are the perceptions of academic stakeholders during educational enhancement projects?

What are beliefs about themselves before and during enhancement projects? Were there contestations and reconciliations? How might perceptions of stakeholders support development of the change initiatives themselves?

> Can testimonies reveal how the context of change had an effect on staff experience? Therefore provide useful knowledge to the enhancement team?

### **Data: Fractional team member**

#### "The timeframe

versus the number of students. It's an obvious barrier."

"I think it needs a shakeup and everybody should be willing to change the way they do things. It's very easy for departments to get, kind of like, with blinkers and maybe not expand their kind of thinking in terms of the type of stuff that we should be teaching."

### **Team leader**

"I didn't have any feelings about it negatively or positively. It's an opportunity for us to not necessarily formalize things but actually get together. We get together so infrequently as a large team.

Talking about the weight of processes and about performative practice of leadership: 'I'm as guilty of that as anyone. Sometimes I just shuffle between things that are on my calendar and just kind of physically take myself there.

### **Department manager**

"It is hard managing your team sometimes with the change. This 'filter through' is quite hard, from team leaders down to HPL teams. Lots gets lost in translation.'

'The higher management at the university?
They already a know
what the problems are:
Space, numbers, staffing.'

'The staff are 'maxxed out'. 'It is a HUGE task. It is 'enormous!'

### Senior department manager

"I need to convince staff to do it. I think there is sometimes change fatigue."

"We repackage, we rebadge it, we re- re- everything and it is pretty much the same."

"We have all these new initiatives but almost dismantle everything that we've just done to prove this new initiative. Then another new initiative comes along every couple of years and by the time we have gotten comfortable with it, it's changing again."

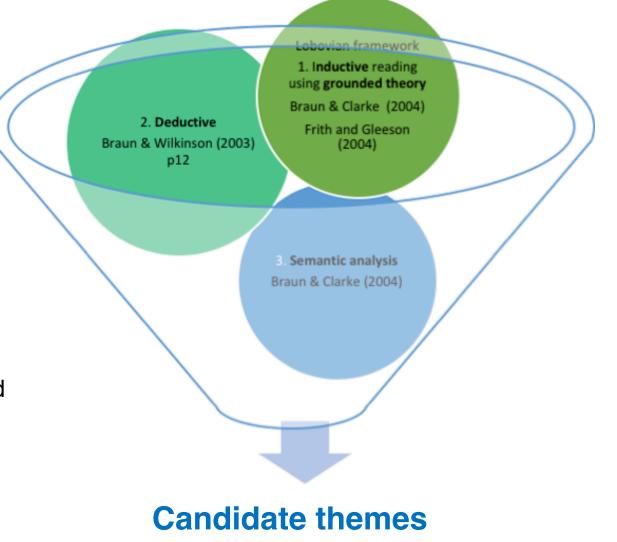
### **Stages of analysis**

1. Grounded analysis following Braun

& Clarke's (2004) six phases of thematic analysis.

2. Deductive analysis, following Braun & Wilkinson (2003).

3. Semantic language analysis, where the sound and patterns of the language used, revealed clues to the thoughts of each storyteller Braun & Clarke's (2004)



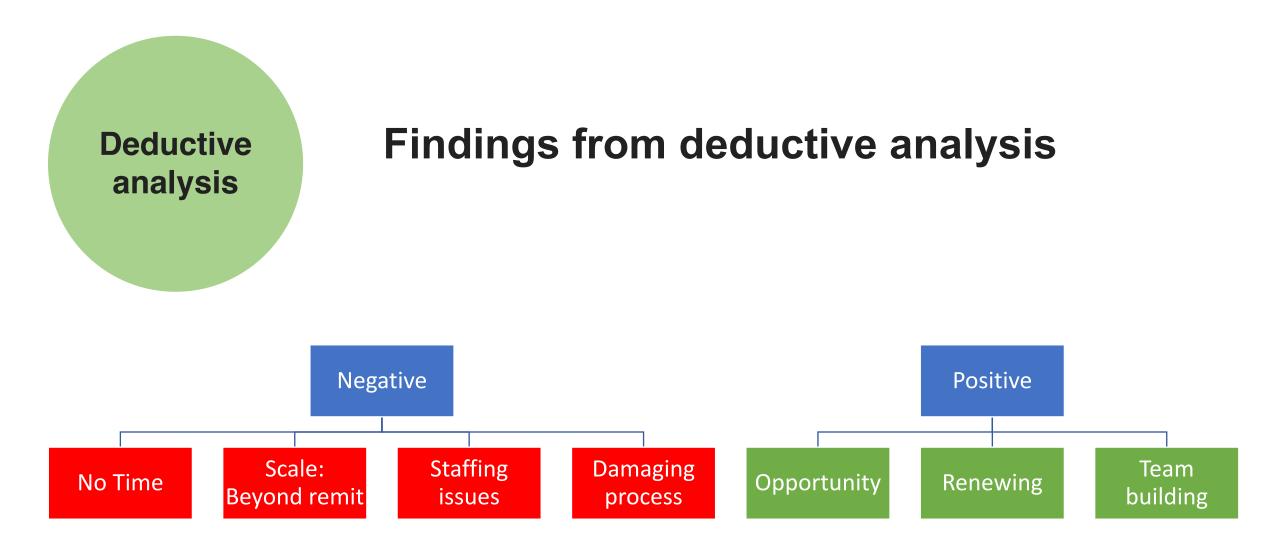
### Inductive analysis

### **Findings from inductive reading**

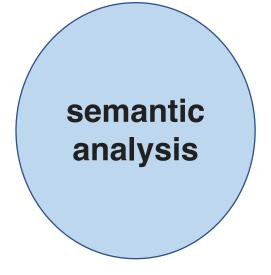
**Time** Even if there is time: the perception is that it does not allow for enhancement. 'Everybody works very hard and is 'maxxed out'.

Space The inadequate physical space and rooms were mitigating factors.Brown's research at Anglia Ruskin (2014), underlines the relationship such environmental factors can have on classroom management.

**Resources** Student to staff ratio was above the universities recommended levels and had already been raised but the perception was this was not heard. Course resilience in terms of staffing was a big issue for the managers.



Thematic map showing two emergent themes:



### The story of the story

Mapping of metaphors and idioms used revealed a pattern between senior and junior

Negative and positive = x axis Level of stakeholder = y axis

#### **Negative perception**

Initiatives don't ever fade away. This is why there is overload.

There's a moment where we are trying to do everything. We are trying to rubber stamp this, this and this.

Everybody is defending their turf. Some staff will see this as finger pointing and blaming.

People are absolutely maxed out. People are clinging on for dear life, firefighting only

It is an awful lot it is enormous.

There will be a bit of eye rolling about putting certain things in place. There will be moaning behind the scenes.

The elephant in the room. We need more people. Students think that the [NSS] information goes higher than us. We said 'Basically it is used as a big stick to hit us with for the next year'. They were astonished.

We can only maybe minimise the damage.

Departments get blinkers on It is kind of these invisible barriers

#### Neutral

I take off my managerial hat and let things run.

I can't dictate change. If I did then it is a very different dynamic.

The filter [of communication] is quite hard. Lots gets lost in translation.

If somebody does pin point a year and they have done terribly, then they will be llke 'oh' and 'yeah'

The PgCert does feel quite uncomfortable, it is not nice to feel you are scrambling around Staff development can make you feel out of your depth I just don't like to just blurt out stuff if it is not formulated in my head. Not just shouting something out for the sake of it.

#### **Positive perception**

I think there is a safe space for them to talk.

People that are here, they are at the top of their class, the top of their game

People are passionate for their own

#### It is a good thing

They work across year's otherwise they are not invested in the whole journey. We're on a bit of a trajectory as a course.

The workshop will bring to light different approaches Good opportunity while it is fresh in our minds to start thinking. A good opportunity to

brainstorm some ideas.

Colour Key and frequency of occurences in dataset

Senior: Taylor Negative = 10 Positive = 3Neutral = 1

staff

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Senior Robin Negative = 9 Positive = 0Neutral = 1

Middle Lee Negative = 4 Positive = 2Neutral = 1

Part Time Yati staff Negative = 2 Positive = 3Neutral = 3TOTAL Negative = 25 Positive = 8Neutral = 6

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### Narrator's story

#### One month in

Our conversation drifts into 'how we can support a situation where management issues exist, that we are not party to?'

#### Four months in

The change initiative project is like a new shoe that needs a bit of wearing in. If doesn't quite fit at the moment.

#### Six months in

They are less than keen to engage with the enhancement initiative, and insist they don't need outside expertise. The workshop is postponed.

#### 12 months in

There's a renewed interest in staff knowledge of the issues. We talked about the announcement to fund new academic posts.

The outlook is largely positive. The changes in the courses are slowly and steadily taking place.

### Findings Q1 and Q2

| What are the perceptions<br>of academic stakeholders during<br>educational enhancement projects?         | <ol> <li>Team resilience</li> <li>Negative evidence as a<br/>barrier to change</li> <li>Legacy of the change</li> </ol>   |
|--|---|
| How might perceptions of<br>stakeholders<br>support development of the change<br>initiatives themselves? | <ol> <li>Incentivising change</li> <li>Balancing academic management with<br/>academic leadership</li> <li>Delivering a positive supportive model</li> <li>Understanding course cultures</li> </ol> |

Q2. Knowledge of change initiatives

#### 1. Incentivising change

Don't layer on previous initiatives and overload. Be clear when previous initiatives end.

#### 2. Balancing academic management with academic leadership

Team leaders need support with academic management.

'At an institutional level, **the heart of** ... **NSS questions is tied up in the management of performance.** There has been plenty of HEA work on the pedagogy ...but the real issues are in understanding the complexity of administrative **systems, academic workload, and the cultural difficulties involved in leaders wanting academics to perform to a standard and deadline** – all in a context of deteriorating industrial relations.' Dickinson, J. (2018) 'Student views, student surveys, and getting better at responding' Q2. Knowledge of change initiatives 3. Delivering a positive supportive model

Successful change, like successful learning, is a constructive process - the change is integrated into the heads and hearts of those involved. Like learned 'knowledge', the change is uniquely shaped during this process - which is sometimes referred to as acquiring 'ownership' of change but is actually broader than that (if ownership is understood as the feeling) that this innovation is 'ours'). Trowler, Saunders and Knight. (2003, p18)

Q2. Knowledge of change initiatives

#### 4. Understanding course cultures

Understanding micro cultures is key to enabling organizational change:

There is also an invisible infrastructure and history of interlacing communities, conversations and processes (the culture) and of course the dark matter of brand and reputation gluing everything together. Understanding the interplay of these components is crucial to university leadership. There is a place for grand plan activity....Meanwhile, village life will go on – well or poorly depending on local abilities and circumstances. Each village is a tight community with its own mix of specialisms, both academic and professional. The success of the university as a whole depends more on this than on the grand plans. (Gore, 2018).

### **Conclusions**

- ✓ Understanding course cultures first could be a key component in improving enhancement models themselves.
- ✓ Staff need an appropriate disciplinary specific approach to enhancement and the necessary resources to complete this work
- ✓ When staff are supported in a positive manner they are more likely to give students the attention they need
- $\checkmark$  A negative approach to enhancement will only cause barriers

to be put in place.

This leads to more questions...

### **More questions**

How can enhancement models embrace a 'no blame' model which enables tutors to make changes to their practice in a safe space and feel they will not be made 'completely responsible' for gaps and failures?

What can be done about the tone of voice used in delivering enhancements? Can we improve the perception and the well-being of those involved in the actual enhancement processes?

A new piece of research would need to be undertaken to investigate beyond the initial perceptions and undertake a study to evaluate perceptions before and after enhancements.

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