How quality policy interacts with quality practice
– a close-up view from five “teaching cultures” in a research intensive higher education institution

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There are problems with policy implementation in relation to teaching and learning
Almost no effects detected
(Bauer et al. 1999; Hedin 2004; Lund University 2006; Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2009)
Various problems with policy implementation
(Gordon 2002; Newton 2003; Henkel 2005; Stensaker 2006; Clegg 2010; Coates 2010)
Discussion about aspects of policy implementation
(Trowler 1998; Fanghanel 2007; Merton et al. 2009; Vidovich et al. 2011)

High quality practice meets teaching and learning policies

Q: How do high quality contexts deal with a particular “quality-policy” in relation to their own practice?

The policy
The European Bologna Treaty, a teaching quality framework stressing (among other things) the introduction of, and reliance on, formulating learning outcomes, and a process of rewriting all syllabi.

Three Lenses on Organization
(John van Maanen, MIT, 2007)

Strategic Design
Organizations are machines
An organization is a mechanical system crafted to achieve a defined goal. Parts must fit well together and match the demands of the environment.
Action comes through planning.

Political
Organizations are contests
An organization is a social system encompassing diverse, and sometimes contradictory, interests and goals. Competition for resources is expected.
Action comes through power.

Cultural
Organizations are institutions
An organization is a symbolic system of meanings, artifacts, values, and routines. Informal norms and traditions exert a strong influence on behavior.
The investigation

5 strong microcultures (three faculties)
Groups of people working together within the university, tied together by sharing a discipline, department, working-group or educational programme.

Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011
Understanding strong academic microcultures
an exploratory study, Lund University

Results in short, signifies all five microcultures:
1) Tightly integrated (high trust) working contexts oriented towards a far-reaching goal (enterprise)
2) Heavily path dependent (Saga)
3) High ambitions in teaching (expectations and support) – within existing local teaching “paradigm”
4) Well oriented in the wider organisational context with effective internal flow of information (absorptive capacity)
5) In control of when and how to engage externally (agency)
6) Invisible from the views of the managers

Reactions to the Bologna policy – examples (not quotes)
1) We’ll do it, but do not want to be seen as too keen
2) We started to work on it, but there were all these rules, so... We lost interest
3) We use the learning outcomes all the time, during collaboration with industry for example
4) When I realised what it was, I decided we could rearrange the entire curriculum. It was because of this idea from 1968
5) It was like a wave, a tsunami even. Shockwave, and then it was over. So quick. We’ve just started. And it was gone already
6) Well, we did it. It is usable while we communicate with the profession. But the faculty? I don’t know. They are so far away

(Wenger, 1998; Clark, 1998; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008)
Policy discourses

A policy carries two discourses
1) "the coordinative discourse among policy actors", and
2) the "communicative discourse between political actors and the public" (implementation)

These two can be interwoven into a master discourse, which provides a vision of where things are going, and where they ought to go.

(Schmidt, 2008)

Dissonances in the relation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy (policymakers)</th>
<th>Microcultures</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Oriented towards future</td>
<td>- Orientation towards tradition/</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Focus on measurables (artefacts)</td>
<td>Saga</td>
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<td>- Short term objectives, outcomes</td>
<td>- Focus on underlying</td>
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<td>- Coordinative activities and control</td>
<td>assumptions</td>
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<td>- Communicative discourse, reducing</td>
<td>- Long term objectives,</td>
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<tr>
<td>complexity</td>
<td>enterprise</td>
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<td>- Policy makers in power, specific</td>
<td>- Trust/identity/belonging</td>
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<td>actions required</td>
<td>- Generosity towards</td>
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<td>practitioners, maintaining</td>
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<td>complexity</td>
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<td>- Practitioners have a wide</td>
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<td>array of options, adaptive to</td>
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Organisational culture and leadership
(Schein 2004)

Three levels in cultures

- Artefacts: 
  - Produced daily by members
  - Things an observer can see, classify, and measure

- Espoused theories: 
  - Interpretations by members
  - Socially validated solutions to problems

- Underlying assumptions: 
  - Unconscious beliefs
  - Almost never change, if so, often related to crises

Selection of microcultures

Selection based on
- Interviews (11) with leaders (deans, HoDs) and students
- Evaluations (CEQ, HSV)
- Local knowledge

Results:
- Leaders don’t know
  - a lack of shared value system in relation to Q in teaching and learning

Criteria for selection:
- Strong in research AND in teaching
- Wide array of teaching (levels, methods)
- Fairly large sized in terms of student numbers (150-1000)
- Reputation as being good
Selected microcultures - an overview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group size (employed)</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>S</th>
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<td>Small 10 – 15</td>
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<td>Medium 20 - 25</td>
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<th>Formal organisation</th>
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<th>Homogeneity or complex</th>
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<th>Research (RQ08)</th>
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<td>Excellent</td>
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Number of interviewees – an overview

Totally 45 persons were interviewed: 17 academics (9 of which were also leaders) and 28 students

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<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>2 men 1 woman</td>
<td>2 men 2 women</td>
<td>2 men 1 woman</td>
<td>3 men 1 woman</td>
<td>3 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1 man 3 women</td>
<td>6 women</td>
<td>5 men 2 women</td>
<td>4 men 2 women</td>
<td>2 men 3 women</td>
</tr>
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The following slides describe results from the original study (see below)

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Results (features)

- MCs orient themselves towards a shared *enterprise*, a compass (future)
- Members relate to a MC-specific *saga* (past)
- The enterprise is about making a difference as a discipline, or as a group
- Members of the MC articulate an astonishing level of *trust* in each other and in the enterprise

General results (teaching)

- Strong engagement for students and their learning
- Students are challenged, supported, and treated as peripheral participants (apprentices)
- Teaching vary in form (traditional lecture-based to constant innovation and change)
- Teaching and research are seen as integrated parts of a coherent professional identity
- Personal mastery in teaching is clearly present but is supported in different ways
- A lot of SOTL-activities going on and highly valued but not described as SOTL.

Results (inner organisation)

- MCs display a strong but varying collegial leadership (one strong acknowledged leader or distributed leadership based on seniority)
- MCs are hierarchical with a distinct distribution of power
- Members appear to submit themselves to the hierarchy as a integrated part of academic freedom

Results (external relations)

- MCs interact actively with the surrounding world (e.g. stakeholders outside and inside the university)
- MCs are well-oriented about things going on in their organisational context
- The faculty/school is not of their prime concern, this is rather related to the enterprise
- MCs respond with engagement (collaborate, support, or resist) when policies etc. are found to be related to the enterprise
Message for senior management

- Due to the absence of a shared value system for quality in teaching, MCs do not compete with or challenge each other. Poor quality exists side by side with teaching excellence
- 20 years of quality discourse have not made any difference

This study

- We have focused on microcultures as they are constructed by the teachers
- Through literature we have hypothesised traits significant for strong microcultures
- We have not looked at student outcomes
- The study is limited in numbers of interviews and observations
- The results need to be contrasted by e.g. studies of weak or developing microcultures