

Research Culture of Private Universities in Malaysia: Using Contradictions in Activity Theory

Thuraisingam, T.^{1*}, Hukam Parvinder, K.¹, David, M. K.² and Nair, V.¹

¹Taylor's University, Malaysia, No. 1, Jalan Taylor's, 47500, Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

²University Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACTS

As a result of the Ministry of Higher Education's strategic and strong thrust to enhance research and innovation in private universities in Malaysia, the work world of professionals in tertiary education has been redefined, with an emphasis on academic research. To get to grips with the dynamics of the changing institutional practices, policies, purposes and new forms of work demanding new skills, tools and resources, Engestrom's activity theory with its focus on change is relevant. Activity Theory affords a gestalt view of and a multi-level analysis from the individual, interactional and collective perspectives. It unpacks interdependencies and relations between subjects, objects, tools, community, rules and division of labor. Activity Theory also discusses issues of power, agency and how systemic changes are shaped by history and culture. Such systemic and multi-faceted changes result in tensions described as 'contradictions' that is a core principle of Activity Theory which explains and potentially creates new forms of development. Data to mirror the changing research culture of four private universities was obtained from semi-structured interviews with 10 academics. The data revealed many contradictions in the research practices of Malaysian private universities; contradictions in the division of labor, rules, norms and traditions, instruments and policies and among communities. Pointing out the central contradictions of the system can prove to be diagnostic as it may chart the situation, recognize the problems and point to possibilities for development.

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E-mail addresses:

thavamalar.thuraisingam@taylors.edu.my (Thuraisingam, T.),

parvinder.h@taylors.edu.my (Hukam Parvinder, K.),

mdavid@um.edu.my (David, M. K.),

vicky.nair@taylors.edu.my (Nair, V.)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The 1980s saw a rapid increase in demand for higher education in Malaysia, and despite increasing capacities, public universities

were unable to cope with the growing numbers, resulting in many applicants who did not get places in public HEIs (higher education institutions) seeking higher education abroad. Almost 20 percent of Malaysian students were studying abroad in 1995 and this cost the country 800 million US Dollars in currency outflow (Silverman, 1996, p.26). This led the Malaysian government to privatize and corporatize higher education (Marimuthu, 2008; Sam, 2008). Several acts were passed by Parliament, with the turning point being the enactment of the Private Higher Education Institutions Act (PHEIA) 1996 which further liberalized the private education sector and provided the legal framework for the establishment of franchises, degree courses as well as the upgrading of private colleges to university status. The private sector has since played a pivotal role in complementing and supplementing the efforts of the public sector in its responsibilities of providing higher education opportunities and accessibility while in tandem reducing the outflow of funds for education overseas (Marimuthu, 2008; Ong and Chong, 2004).

In 2004, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) was established to manage the 900,000 students pursuing higher education in 20 public universities, 33 private universities and university colleges, 4 foreign university branch campuses, 22 polytechnics, 37 community colleges and about 500 private colleges (MOHE, 2012). At that juncture, MOHE's mission was to create a higher education environment that will foster the development of academic

and institutional excellence. Since acquiring university status, these private universities have had to comply with the Ministry of Higher Education's expectations, whose objectives are to transform Malaysia into a center of educational excellence and to internationalize the higher education sector. The 10th Malaysian Plan (2011 – 2015) tabled by the Prime Minister, envisions the Malaysian private education sector attracting 150,000 international students by 2015. MOHE also aims to drive higher educational institutions into producing graduates who are competitive and able to generate new knowledge through world class quality research (MOHE, 2012). Private institutions are also under the close scrutiny of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency which was established in 2007 to accredit academic programs in HEIs and undertake the role of quality assurance and standard monitoring of higher education in Malaysia. The MQA is also tasked with ranking higher education institutions in Malaysia (SETARA – Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions) which is made public for potential students to check prior to enrolling. This ranking system also considers research endeavors and consultancy to be one of the main criteria. To add to this, the Ministry of Higher Education has since 2009 used the Malaysian Research Assessment (MyRA) to rate the research output of many public universities, private universities and private university colleges in the country (MOHE, 2011). Hence, the existence of both the MOHE and MQA, places much emphasis

on research and innovation driven activities in higher education institutions in the country.

All of these regulations and rating systems have raised the bar for private universities who have been in the past, predominantly focused on teaching and learning (Loh, 2011). Should these recently awarded private universities wish to maintain their university status, they will have to commit to contributing to the research output of the nation. Most of these private universities are managed like commercial corporations – they minimize cost, increase efficiency and are market oriented. Return on investment (ROI) is an important measurement for most endeavors in the private universities. Hence, although many private universities in Malaysia have only had their university ‘licenses’ for less than a decade and are relatively new to the university culture - namely research and publication, a few of these universities have been quick to set up research centers and postgraduate schools to mobilize research work in an attempt to respond to changing expectations in the Malaysian private education scene. Many new policies have also been put in place within these institutions, with research, consultancy and commercialization activities being incorporated into appraisal systems for academic staff. In short, the research agenda in the private universities are fast-tracked to match the research output of the public universities.

Previous Studies on Private Higher Education in Malaysia

Recent studies into higher education in Malaysia have remained focused on the privatization of higher education (Sivalingam, 2006), the role of private institutions (Ong and Chong, 2004; Marimuthu, 2008) and the development of sustainable competitive strategies (Loh, 2011). One study by Sam (2008) attempted to discuss the research environment of private HEIs and focused on comparisons between R&D centers in non-profit and for-profit private HEIs. The present study aims to contribute to this body of research by identifying and understanding some of the challenges emerging through the lens of Activity Theory in the form of contradictions experienced by academics in private universities in responding to the newly established research climate.

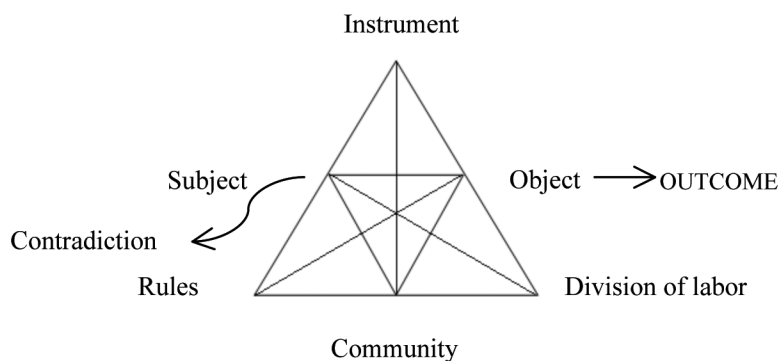
ACTIVITY THEORY

The changing research culture of the education profession within Malaysian private universities has generated multi-faceted responses ranging from new purposes to new forms of work and responsibilities, new ways of regulating work and new appraisal criteria which in turn have called for new instruments, resources and policies. Engestrom’s (1987) Activity Theory provides a broad analytic base to deal with these changes. Engestrom’s Helsinki school of Activity Theory is located within Vygotsky (1978) and Leontev’s (1981)

cultural historical Activity Theory. Hence, this study opted for activity theory because it enables a Gestalt view of the research culture prevalent in private universities. It provides a lens through which the study could focus on the complexity of the dynamic interrelationships between the many aspects for example the academics' perspectives, the managements' perspectives, resources available, the objectives of the universities, the community of practice and the many policies and rules that the academics are subjected to. Thus the private university becomes one unit of analysis. Traditionally

as well, Engestrom's activity theory has been most relevantly applied to understand the many interventions in the field of education (Basharina, 2007; Barab *et al.*, 2002; Virkkunen & Kutti, 2000; Jonassen & Murphy, 1999).

The structure of a Human Activity System refers to a specific social setting in which the activity takes place. The activity system has been defined as "object oriented, collective and culturally mediated human activity" (Engestrom *et al.*, 1999, p.19). It facilitates analysis of a multitude of symbiotic relationships between the nodes



Subject: The individual or group whose agency is chosen as the point of view, in the analysis. In this study the views of academic staff in a private university are central to the activity.

Object: The 'problem place' at which the activity is aimed. Here the object is the changing research culture. Activity is directed at it to obtain excellence in research output.

Mediating Instruments: The object is achieved through the help of mediating instruments, in this case improved infrastructure, support system and policies to facilitate research among academic staff.

Community: The multiple groups of stakeholders in higher education. For the present study community comprises MOHE, management and staff in private universities.

Division of labor: The division of labor includes both the horizontal divisions of labor between members of the community, in this case the academics and the vertical division of power and status which is what gives the decision making powers. In this study, the division of power is between management and academic staff. A focus on power helps Activity Theory to remain true to its Marxist roots and helps unpack power relations in the system.

Rules: These are the explicit and implicit regulations, norms and conventions that constrain actions and interactions within the activity system. In this case, rules which regulate the professional lives of academic staff, their usage of time, measurement of outcomes and criteria for appraisals and reward may influence the research output at private universities.

Fig. 1: The Structure of a Human Activity System Engestrom, 1987, p. 78

and yet, it allows the researchers to focus on specific nodes of the complex and the changing activity system as well. The nodes include; *subject, instrument and object* as well as *rules, community and division of labor* as illustrated in Fig.1.

Activity Theory's appeal lies in how it brings together multiple perspectives, interests, histories, agendas and traditions and broadens our understanding of the activity system. Activity Theory, in giving prominence to the agency of various stakeholders especially the subjects, is creating a dynamic activity system which is being continuously negotiated, constructed and reconstructed. The object may become established rules which in turn may be questioned or reinterpreted or new rules may be resisted. This much dynamism and multivoicedness is often a source of contradiction within an activity system. Contradictions - a core principle of the theory- are seen as a source of transformation and change. This is the reason Engestrom thinks of an activity system as a "virtual disturbance and innovation producing machine" (1987, p.16). Contradictions are seen as potential developments which force to propel the system further. They help transcend problems to provide solutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach to data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews. Interview requests were sent out via e-mail to 15 academics from five private universities but only 10 interviewees from four institutions agreed

to be interviewed. Thus, three academics each were interviewed from two of the institutions and another two each were interviewed from the other two institutions. Each interview lasted between 45 to 75 minutes. The universities of choice were the ones which had long been established as educational institutions but had been granted university status in recent years. The chosen universities have also included research as part of their strategic planning for the future.

All the informants of this study had worked with the identified private institutions for more than five years. Three out of the 10 interviewees were research heads in their institutions; two others were heads of departments while the remaining five were full time lecturers. The interviewees were from a range of disciplines: business, history, psychology, chemistry, arts, language, tourism, communication and engineering. Five of the interviewees have been involved in research for over five years and have published a few articles in high impact journals whereas the other five interviewees are new to research and have yet to publish.

The interviews were conducted using an interview protocol which comprised the following key areas: institutional support for research, roles and responsibilities of academics, publications, working conditions, funding, incentives, collaboration policies, misalignment of motivations and mentoring. A total of 10 interviews were carried out, recorded electronically and transcribed. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Each transcription was then

further analyzed and the contradictions were identified. Questions that were specific to a particular combination within the activity notation and also representing a sub-activity triangle were then generated to guide the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contradictions are present in every collective activity and manifest themselves as disturbances (deviations from scripted procedure) in work processes and serve as sources of development (Kuutti, 1996). The analysis of the data from the 10 interviews with academics in four private universities located in the Klang Valley indicated the following four contradictions in the activity system:- contradiction 1: subject, tools, object; contradiction 2: subject, rules, object; contradiction 3: subject, community, object and contradiction 4: subject, division of labor, object.

Contradiction 1: Subject – Tools – Object

The questions generated to analyze the tools and mediators are as follows:

1. What tools do the subjects use in doing their tasks?

2. How readily available are the tools to the users?
3. How well do the subjects use these tools?

Lack of Support from Research Centers and Units within the Universities

Since awarding university status to several private colleges in the country,, the MOHE has set standards for private universities to play a more dynamic role in contributing toward research and development to achieve Malaysia’s objectives of becoming a developed nation by 2020. To meet this challenge, many of the private universities have set up research centers, committees and units in order to roll out certain research projects and new policies to stimulate research amongst their academics (Sam, 2008). Although on the surface, it may seem as if these newly established private universities are providing the necessary infrastructure for their academics, in reality this type of support is perceived as merely regulatory and hardly facilitating research productivity. This differential construal about the tools provided gives rise to the first contradiction which emerges between

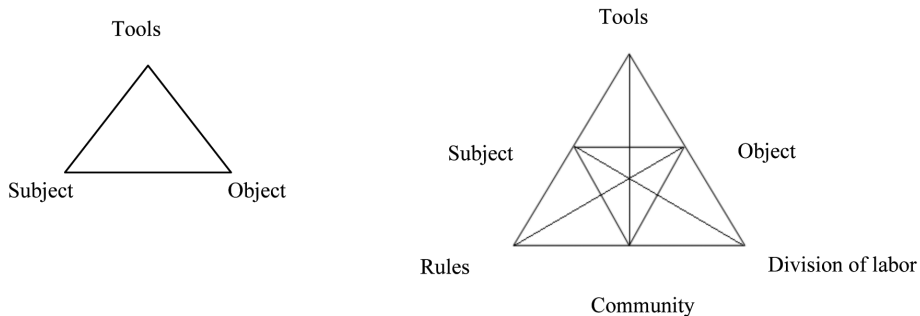


Fig2: Subject-tools-object contradiction in the Activity System

the subject, tools and object nodes in the upper sub-activity triangle as perceived by the academic staff (subjects) in the quotes below:

“The research unit only serves as a record keeping entity – they keep track of which conferences who attended and whose article got published in which type of journal. They do not really provide editorial assistance or mentoring that I could personally benefit from”
~ Interviewee 9

“I think my language and technical skills stand in the way. Journal writing is very different from just writing in English. It would be great if the center could provide us some support in these areas”
~ Interviewee 8

“I fear statistics and writing. I could use some help here”
~ Interviewee 3

“I only go to the research unit to query about purely administrative stuff - submit forms”
~ Interviewee 10

“We have to fork out our own money or be resourceful on our own to secure data analysis packages, they are not made readily available by the research department nor is there budget for it” ~ Interviewee 2

“Everything boils down to money. We cannot purchase nor get access to certain software” ~ Interviewee 5

The academics perceive support to be lacking in the areas of language, statistics, software, instruments and editorial work and that the research centers are merely regulatory; focusing on record keeping and form filling. The major reason for this could be attributed to the corporate culture of private universities, especially the need to ensure profit margins which contradicts the need to invest in support infrastructure for research.

Support in terms of research funding also elicited varied responses. Several respondents commented that there is no funding provision at their institutions and that they often use their own money to fund research projects and pay for conference presentations. While others admit that internal and external funding options are available from their institutions and MOHE, they are quick to point that the process of securing the grants is arduous and bureaucratic as expressed in the following quotes:

“There are many grants, trainings and so on but I have not pursued it. It seems too tedious to go through the whole process and I don't know where to start” ~ Interviewee 8

“They send us a lot of information about grants and all but everything is very time dependent. It is rather

de-motivating when people send you these things and you look at it and go well if you were to do this what type of support could you request for. Writing the whole proposal is very painstaking and you do not have anyone to help you with this huge task” ~ Interviewee 2

“Where to get funds from – internal grants by the institution is very limited. Tapping external funds directly is almost impossible” ~ Interviewee 10

Academics lament, as reflected in the quotes above, that they neither have much time nor adequate knowledge to use the available support services (tools) even when their institutions provide them.

Contradiction 2: Subject-rules-object

The following questions guide the analysis of the subject-rules-object sub-activity triangle:

1. Which rules guide the activities that the subjects engage in?
2. How widely are these rules understood?

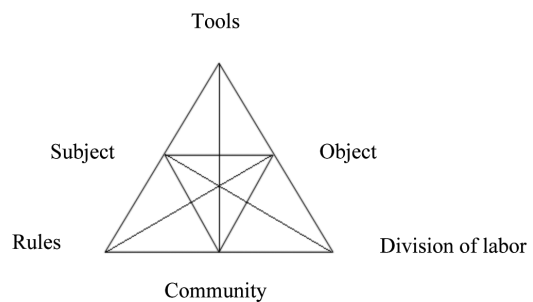
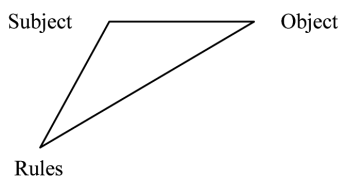


Fig.3: Subject-rules-object contradiction in the Activity System

Breakdown due to the Absence of Well-defined Policies

Analysis of this sub-activity triangle includes that of the rules that regulate the professional lives of academic staff, appraisal criterion, incentives, time, measurement of outcomes and policies which may impact research output in this transitional phase for the private universities.

There seems to be a lack of well-formulated policy frameworks to regulate the research initiatives of the academics:

“Policies are still falling in place and there is still a long way to go.” ~ Interviewee 5

“We are working on the journal research ethics for the institution which we have yet to roll out. We have some policies here and there but there is no one umbrella policy at the moment yet” ~ Interview 1

The policies have yet to seep into the consciousness of the academics or become part of their work world as indicated by the following interviewees:

“There may be some policies but I am not aware of it”~ Interviewee 9

*“Most of the time policies around research are not laid out, it is not entirely an open process”
~ Interviewee 6*

The lack of empathetic consideration of the needs and concerns of the academics in the formulation of policies and the sudden shift of emphasis to research has led them to exclaim:

Some of my colleagues do not see the value of doing research. They view it as a pain and refuse to invest any effort or time in it. They think it unfair from the institution’s standpoint to request them to do research” ~ Interviewee 8

*“The university is so concerned over research to the extent that it can be oppressive for some academics. They have not been given a choice”
~Interviewee 6*

This weakness of the universities’ policies leaves academics in a quandary and indirectly leads to breakdowns within the system as noted by the respondent below:

“We constantly hear that there are many plans and policies that are going to be implemented but internally nothing has been rolled out thus far”~ Interviewee 2

Several studies in various parts of the world reiterate the importance of policies and echo that “a well – defined body of policies that demonstrates the relevance of research for professional advancement and growth is needed” (Salazar-Clemena & Almonte-Acosta, 2007, p.13) in order to develop teaching researchers who are competent and productive (Tural, 2007, Gregorutti, 2010).

Tensions between Appraisal Criteria and Workload Distribution

The private universities were quick to formulate appraisal and promotional policies which incorporated research expectations while maintaining the status quo about workload (teaching, mentoring and administrative responsibilities). These policies have been the source of much discontent and demoralization among academics as expressed in the following quotes:

*“My institution keeps raising the bar when it comes to appraisals – a few years ago it was conference presentation, then they said publication is necessary but now they are saying publish in SCOPUS or ISI or apply for your own grants then you will get some points awarded for your appraisal. They keep raising the bar but are not freeing us sufficiently to enable us to do better quality research”
~ Interviewee 3*

“If you are teaching 20 hours a week, how is one to do research? Our contracts have not changed. There is nothing in black and white to say if you do research, you can teach for 12 hours or something. It is all on a case by case basis”
 ~ Interviewee 5

“The stress comes from time management. Writing for publication takes up a lot of time. It is indeed overwhelming sometimes to strike a balance between teaching, administrative responsibilities and research activities”~ Interviewee 4

The worldwide tension between teaching and research becomes even more pronounced in private universities since these institutions are primarily seen as teaching institutions as that is their *raison d’etre*. Therefore the academics are skeptical of the private university’s research aspirations which they feel are professed merely to fulfill MOHE’s requirement

“I do ask myself at times, does the university genuinely want academics to conduct research and grow as professionals or are they just encouraging us to do research to maintain the university status and nothing more ~ Interviewee 3

The absence of a well-developed body of policies and the mismatch between appraisal criteria and workload distribution are making academics question and doubt the ‘real’ motive behind encouraging research activities at these institutions.

Contradiction 3: Subject-community-object

The following questions guide the analysis of the subject-community-object sub-activity triangle:

1. What is the structure of the social interactions in relation to the activity?
2. What impact does the community have on the subject-object pair?
3. How do the various components of the community interact?

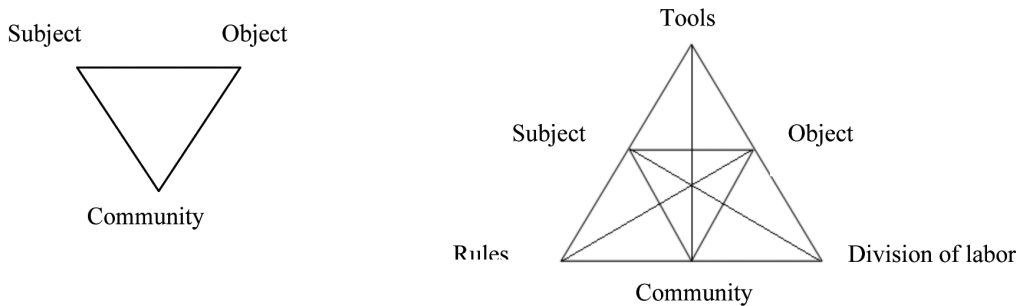


Fig.4: Subject-community-object contradiction in the Activity System

Misalignment of Motivations amongst the Components in the Community

The Community, MOHE and the management of private universities, along with the subject, the academic staff, share the common object of improving research output. The contradiction arises from the diverse agendas that are brought into play. The political motives of MOHE emphasize innovative research “to execute a quantum leap into the developed status for Malaysia by 2020”. The corporate and profit agenda of the management may be at odds with providing adequate support and reducing the teaching load of the academics as indicated below:

“Research is all on top of everything else that you do. The teaching workload stays the same”
~ Interviewee 6

“A few of them, honestly, who I have spoken to feel why should I really have to do research?”
Interviewee 1

The contradictory motives make materialization of research based innovation difficult.

Tensions between Teaching and Research

Malaysian private universities appear to be thriving as teaching universities as a consequence of the mass appeal of higher education as fee paying students throng to the private universities. The

teaching community at these universities still view teaching as the cornerstone of their professional lives as Altbach and Lewis (1997) state: “the academic profession is largely a teaching profession” (p.39) but the newly acquired status of university exerts a lot of pressure on private institutions to prioritize the research mission. This generates tension as academic staff feel caught between teaching and research.

“They are still emphasizing a lot in teaching and other activities. So sometimes I think research becomes secondary” ~ Interviewee 3

“The dean says that we are a profit making institution and where the money goes out-research is a cash outflow for us. Student and teaching is priority” ~ Interviewee 3

“Teaching and other activities as well as the administrative work is overwhelming. Research then is right at the bottom” ~ Interviewee 9

MOHE’s emphasis on knowledge based innovation should create liaisons between government, business, corporation foundations and the academic community. This ‘Triple Helix model’ (Leydesdorff & Etkowitz, 1998) trend is yet to take roots in private universities:

“Nothing commercial so far”
~ Interviewee 2

“We are not pressured to commercialize university research but more towards doing training”
~ Interview 3

“From 2013 to 2016 that is supposed to be the commercialization stage – making money – third stage – that is the plan” ~ Interviewee 1

Research is thus seen as “cash outflow” (Interviewee 3) at private universities. It is yet to move towards the “Triple Helix Model” (Leydesdorff & Etkowitz, 1998) which is partnership of government, the private sector and universities, to boost economic development. This gap keeps the subject and community from optimizing its engagement with the object of activity system.

The Need for a Community of Research

Researchers see themselves as social scientists or scientists, not just by working out social or scientific problems, but through engagement in the discourse of the scientific community and in the context of the values of that community (Bereiter, 1991, 1994). Much is to be gained by viewing research activity as always nested in the very complex context of the community which shapes research performance or the lack of it.

Lave and Wenger (1991) view community of practice as supporting learning, it is not just a context but a tool that mediates interaction between subject and object (Barab *et al.*, 2004). Barab *et al.*

(2004) further point out that this treatment elevates the notion of community from simply occupying the bottom of the triangle, whose reach is distributed across the multiple components as it functions as tool, object, outcome or even subject. The lack of a community with the multiple functions mentioned is regretted by the academics as expressed below:

“There is neither community of research nor publishing. It all comes down to the individual. Co-authoring amongst staff is not high”
~ Interviewee 2

“The corporate rivalry between the private university constraints any collaboration between their academics. The idea is that private universities cannot work together”
~ Interviewee 1

The community is a very dynamic arena where peripheral participants may become core members. There is a lack of opportunities for work improvement with mentors as formative advisors to help the experts. This is especially conspicuous in private higher education institutions.

This enculturation is essential for the community to grow. Interviewees in this study were painfully aware of the absence of such mentors:

“So we actually need some leaders for the accounting area. We do not have anyone to fall back on”
~ Interviewee 3

Exactly the same sentiment was expressed by another interviewee in relation to publication:

“It is frightening to try and publish on your own. You get a rejection then you start wondering what to do now” ~ Interviewee 2

“The review was very bad. I went into a mild depression and since then I have not looked at it” ~ Interviewee 8

The opposing motivations, a lack of community research, unintended and controversial consequences of the policies, are indicators of discord or contradiction between the subject, object and community nodes, expressed more positively -these are the potential opportunities for growth, improvement and interventions.

Contradiction 4: Subject - Division of labor – Object

The analysis of the contradiction of subject-division of labor-object is guided by the following questions:

1. Who has traditionally taken on the different roles?
2. How does that affect individual or work group activities or breakdowns?
3. What factors drive the role change?
4. How do these roles relate to the researchers output?

In the context of private universities, policy makers and implementers exercise power and control while the academic staff are constrained by these policies and practices.

Inconsistent Implementation of Research Policies

In the present study, the social interchange and social relations are influenced by the diverse interpretations of the policies and the roles by the deans as seen below:

“My dean sits with each of us for hours to motivate and support us when we are at sharp angles, when we have problems with time management etc. He backs us up very much. He is my main motivating factor” ~ Interviewee 4

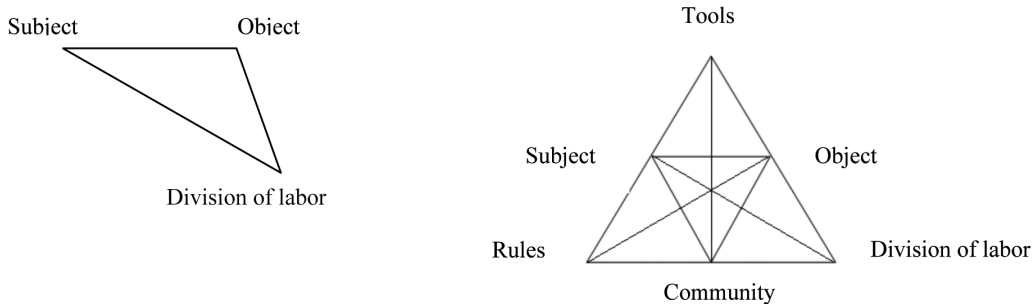


Fig.5: Subject-division of labor-object contradiction in the Activity System

and

“We have a very proactive research vice chancellor, he is young and accessible – his job description and personality make people go to him with their problems. Personally, he made a huge difference to me”

~ Interviewee 5

More specifically, how deans frame research policies and regulate the opportunities and constraints which the academics experience was expressed by many interviewees and two of them said:

“The dean feels that our function is to teach whether you do research or not is up to you” ~ Interviewee 8

More positively:

“The department of psychology developed this strong interest in research purely because of the dean. He started with three other colleagues” ~ Interviewee 2

This situation is summed up by interviewee 1:

“The interpretations by the different schools are very much dependent on who is heading the school. Schools that are headed by research oriented people, they understand the problems of the academics better.”

The above tension shows the control and the regulatory face of power where decisions are made and implemented without consultation. The regulatory powers and controls need to be redefined to measure up to the object and output of research.

One Model Fits All Disciplines Policies

The discrepancy in the research output across different academic disciplines has led to many questions – Is it the nature of the discipline? Is it their research tradition? Is it the research scholarship of the academics? Is it the grantsmanship of the faculty? Are the criteria and the reward structures inappropriate, or are comparisons untenable?

“The school of health sciences has more research output than that in other schools” ~ Interviewee 5

In most private universities the consensus is that research output in sciences is encouraging:

“Especially in the sciences, we have been quite successful. Social Science is still slow” ~ Interviewee 1

It is interesting that arts and humanities were not even given a mention. A point resented by the next interviewee:

“The institution is run by engineers who have hegemony over what happens and it is their idea of what research is, as in the sciences there are documents that prove it. for

example ISI journal publications. They are ignorant of humanities and even more so of arts, it is a very prejudicial approach – it is classic hegemony” ~ Interviewee 6

The contradiction of uniform research KPIs and reward structures for disciplines which are vastly different could help us realize the shifting nature of knowledge production because as Dunderstadt (1999) points out, disciplinary configurations are changing so rapidly that departments have difficulty coping with new ways of seeing. Today, those who are at the cutting edge of their fields are often those who travel across them: the catchword today is ‘interdisciplinary’.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Traditional academic teaching roles have been challenged by the introduction of the element of research as the object and contradictions and tensions have emerged in and between the elements of the activity system. Activity Theory allows the researcher to recognize the discord created by multiple agendas of the community, the tensions between teaching and research, the lack of clarity of policies especially at the level of implementation,, the lack of serious and consistent mentoring, the lack of appropriate support, the lack of clear articulation of expectations, the lack of training for tracking new sources of funding, the lack of time, the lack of a colleagues’ network and heavy teaching loads. Policy

makers need to tailor the standards for research to meet the unique context of each discipline and keep in mind that there is no one model to fit all even with regard to the reward structure.

Malaysian private universities need to position themselves to balance the tensions mentioned above in order to let activity systems evolve to accommodate the shifting nature of knowledge production and develop a more flexible vision of academic career paths rather than the one dimensional reward structure emphasizing research scholarship and grantsmanship which does not create the synergy that should exist between research and education.

The size and scope of this study limits generalization of results, but the theoretical framework of Activity Theory with its interventionist methodology could be used with a larger sample which may recommend engaging the interviewees and administrative or management personnel to resolve the contradictions or tensions so as to facilitate knowledge creation and innovation.

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