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Mats Alvesson and André Spicer

**(Un)Conditional surrender? Why do professionals willingly comply with managerialism.**

**Abstract**

Why do professionals surrender their autonomy? In this paper we look at the case of academics, in particular business school academics. We trace how this group of professionals have progressively surrendered their autonomy and complied with the demands of managerialism. We argue this has been reinforced through *coercive* forms of power like rewards and punishment and bureaucratization; *manipulation* and *mainstreaming* through pushing a particular version of research to the top of the agenda; *domination* through shaping norms and values; and *subjectification* through creating new identities. We note this process was not all encompassing. It often entailed academics having to deal with tensions and paradoxes such as compliance and resistance, as well as love of work and loathing of it. To deal with these paradoxes, academics often treat their work as a game and see themselves as players. While process enables academics to reconcile themselves with their loss of autonomy, it has troubling collective outcomes: the production of increasing uninteresting and irrelevant research.

## Introduction

It is often claimed that professionals are difficult to manage. This is because they are autonomous, self-governing and have stronger loyalty to their profession than their employers. It frequently said that managing professionals is like 'herding wild cats' (Löwendahl 1997:63). The Rector of a Swedish university some years ago gave a talk with some emotion emphasizing that 'the organization need to be improved. We must make sure that decisions are implemented. In can't be so any longer that decisions are treated as arguments in a debate'. This tradition of debate still tends to dominate in many universities. Academics ask for good arguments, not instructions on how they might perform better in a measurement exercise. Most academics, even in business schools, claim that they do their work out of love (Clarke et al 2012). Instrumental concerns seem to come second.

Professionals, we are told, value autonomy. There are many examples of professionals surrendering their autonomy in the face of managerial change agendas. It has happened in health care as management systems have been imported from automobile manufacturing to control the workflow of doctors. It has happened in the law as traditional partnerships have become corporations. Now even priests are being sent on management training courses in business schools. In each of these cases, there have been ongoing skirmishes. But on the whole many professionals seem to have surrendered their highly values autonomy. Why?

One striking example of this process can be seen in the universities. If there is one group of professionals who are suppose to value autonomy very highly, it is academics. But in the last few decades many academics have very 'flexible' when it comes to this virtue. Sure, there are frequent complaints about the loss of autonomy. Some savvy academics have made a career doing this. But, on the whole, many academics have complied with managerial diktats and the creeping emphasis on instrumental rewards. This stands in stark contrast with traditional understandings of academics as difficult to manage. How come there has been so little resistance and so much compliance?

This quandry is wonderful captured by Slawomir Magala (2009), who points out that most academics have trapped themselves with professional bureaucracy which severely curtail their autonomy. They comply with this system in the pursuit of the promise of upward mobility. Yet they want to maintain a fantasy of themselves as radicals who identify with the underdog. To keep this fantasy alive, they organise fringe conferences and academic meetings to discuss avant guard cinema, dissect post war European philosophy or stage theatrical events they have penned. They may play at being radical, but they almost totally compliant in their day to day work. How did this happen?

In this paper we try to answer this puzzling question by looking at instances when academics comply with new forms of managerial control. In particular, we explore how academics working in business schools have enthusiastically complied. To explain why this happens, we argue it is necessary to consider the role of power. We argue that all four face of power – coercive, agenda setting, ideological and discursive – seem to be at work in driving academics to comply with the current managerial regime. But what is particular interesting is that this compliance is not straight forward. It is riddled with paradoxes such

as compliance and resistance; love of academic labour and cynical loathing of it. To cope with these paradoxes, academics begin to see their work as a game which can be played. This game involves not just strategic compliance with the rules of 'research' (Butler and Spoelstra, 2012), but a kind of gaming of different positions. When this happens, apparently autonomous professionals can get so tightly bound up with the playing with power relations, they stop think outside the game, they avoid asking questions and they just enthusiastically comply.

By pointing out how professionals surrender their autonomy through dynamics of gaming, we hope to make a number of contributions. First, we add to the growing literature looking at conditions of work for professionals in business schools (eg. Clark and Knights, 2014). We build on the observations that many critical management scholars see their research work as a kind of game (Butler and Spoelstra 2013). We point out this has much wider application, and helps to explain how people can willingly relinquish their autonomy in the face of increasing managerial demands. Second, we add to the wider debate about growing managerialism within the university sector as a whole and the broader implications this has for professional autonomy (eg. Magala, 2009; Collini, 2012). We do this by drawing attention to how academics have not just been forced to comply with managerial demands – in many cases, they have actually been willing and sometimes very enthusiastically. Third, we also hope to make a wider contribution to the ongoing debate about the control of professionals (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman 2004). Over the last decade or so, this literature has largely highlighted the role which identity regulation plays in this process. Building on what we – and indeed others have observed – we think it is worthwhile considering how professions can be controlled through gaming. Finally, we think there are some important practical implications of our argument. We think it is necessary to think through double-talk (scorning REF and managerialism while smoothly complying with it) which seems to play a role in the current capitulation to increasingly excessive managerial demands. Simply producing ever louder denunciations of the latest managerial initiatives is unlikely to be enough. We think what is needed is *a degaming of academics*.

To make these contributions, we start with some observations of how business schools downplay the objective of offering good education and intellectual qualifications and instead focus on other purposes, like helping students to fake their ability to employers ('employability'). We then point out how managerialism have become increasingly dominant at universities. As a result, the purpose of scholarship (meaningful knowledge) has given way to maximize publication possibilities. We then argue this can be explained by looking at the combination of various forms of power dynamics. We note these different power dynamics can create some interesting paradoxes. We then highlight how academics deal with these paradoxes through treating them as 'game' which needs to be 'played'. We conclude by noting how this push towards gaming might be challenged.

## **The Managed University**

The increasing importance of management and the impact which this has on universities - and the academics who work in them - is not difficult to miss (Collini, 2012). What was once thought to be an institution with its own logic, rituals and administrative tradition has come

to increasingly resemble any other (over) managed organisation. Academics have found themselves working in professional bureaucracies which promise upward mobility through compliance with ranking systems (Magala, 2009). Universities are now replete with many of the similar 'management innovations' which are common in large corporations: they have quality control systems, performance measurement, branding initiatives, marketing and communication units, strategy exercises, visionary leaders, hedging strategies and alliance building initiatives. This strong belief in and widespread use of systems, procedures and initiatives driven by managers we refer to as managerialism.

What to make of all this divides opinion. For some this is a step in the right direction. All these managerial initiatives address the inefficiencies and sloppiness of a field which has been sleepy for too long. According to enthusiasts, by adopting modern management practices, universities can begin to more effectively deliver on their mission. Quality initiatives like the UK's research excellence framework, some claim, have played a central role in transforming many universities from academic sleepy backwaters into cutting edge global centres of excellence.

For others, the rise of managerialism in universities is a problem (e.g. Collini, 2012). Critics point out how the rise of management metrics has seen the decline of traditional values which had underpinned the university. Scholarly virtues such as the pursuit of truth and meaningful and important intellectual contributions are under threat. These changes is thought to be fuelling a longer term decline in the quality of education students receive, the amount of path breaking research being created, and a degradation of standards of work in academia.

Irrespective of the side one takes, there still seems to a mystery here. Instead of putting in place new management systems because they will help to deliver important objectives, it appears many university managers adopt new practices for what are often the most superficial reasons (others are doing it, it will make us look world class). What is more the over-adoption of these ideas often takes up significant resources which could go into delivering on the core missions of the university. What is even more surprising is that most academics typically respond with a kind of passive distain: they think the ideas are stupid, yet they are willing to cynically 'play the game'. This means managers and academics exist in an embrace characterised by perceived managerial stupidity on the one hand and professional cynicism on the other.

These same academics often remain more or less complicit with the process. Sometimes this comes in the form of active complicity such as when a professor suddenly lends their support to a managerial initiative. However, this is only a fairly limited part of how academics respond to managerialism. What is much more common is cynical complicity. This happens when academics think protest will do no good, or will suck up precious time which could be used for doing more pressing things, i.e. fostering their careers. The result is vociferous complaint are often matched with a practical acceptance of an apparently woeful state of affairs. The question that any academic who wants to maintain a lustrous self image (and that is most) must answer, is how does one square one's own intellectual commitment to reason, critique and other fine characteristics with one's own practical commitment to

what they think is a stupid system?

### **Four by Four Factories**

One of the most obvious terrains on which this cynical compliance appears to be at work is in the part of the job that many academics see as being most meaningful: research. There has been a movement from more pluralistic approaches to research (where a wide range of forms of research were seen as appropriate) to a myopic focus on publishing in highly ranked journals. The numbers of journal articles published by a researcher and the level of the journal in which they appear has moved from a modest issue to a major concern. For some it has become almost the only concern. Having something important, relevant and meaningful to say seems to have become comparatively less important than doing and publishing research that appears in the right journal.

The over-riding focus on journal publications has been reinforced by reward systems. In recent years, it has become common to promote people with little breadth of achievements but a few publications in the right journals to professorships. Some schools throughout Europe offer hefty bonuses (in the tens of thousands of Euros) for publication of articles in top ranked journals. Publishing articles in a handful of highly ranked journals has become seen as the only way new academics can secure a relative stable job at a 'good' institution. The flip-side of rewards for publication is an increasingly harsh punishments – or at least a fear of sanctions – for those who don't perform on these narrow criteria. For instance, Martin Parker's (2015) account of Euro Business School (EBS) reports how 'at least one member of staff who was deemed to be failing on ABS terms was paid a considerable amount of money to take severance, also subject to signing a confidentiality agreement. The fact that he also happened to have won every teaching prize that EBS and the university offered appeared not to matter' (p. 286). On the other hand, the mass industry of higher education and in particular business schools call for an army of lecturers of which the majority have nor will not have articles in highly ranked journals – so there are many, in particular lowly ranked institutions employing people with a mediocre research record.

Still, the construction of the ideal and norm of 'everybody' needing to publish in ranked journal dominate and there is some reality behind this. Many UK business school academics emphasize that only journal articles 'count', and that books and other writings are not rewarded. An over-riding concern for many academics is the '4 by 4' formula - publishing four journal articles in journals which are ranked as four star by list like the Association of Business Schools. Often this is not something held at distance by academics. Instead it can be experienced as a deep indicator of one's excellence. In many cases, one's performance becomes a currency for overt status displays. As one senior British management academic put it on email list: 'I wish I had a fiver for every time I've heard academics say 'I've got x number of 4 star papers'.

Turning universities into '4 by 4' factories may be an efficient for organising knowledge production. It certainly has financial advantages for many people. Having a system to create accountability, a 'fair' distribution of resources and ensure academics produce something with the time they are given to do research is reasonable. Producing four good

contributions to knowledge in seven years also seems to be a reasonable demand. Peer assessment based on a combination of the format of the publication and reading texts sounds also fine.

Despite the fact that many of the features of the over-arching assessment system seem entirely acceptable, it is increasingly evident that it may be backfiring. Instead of improving the 'excellence' of research produced by academics, it may be having exactly the opposite effect. Many of the outcomes which this system has produced seem doubtful. One often hears about how much of the research which is currently produced by business schools lacks broader relevance and offers little in the way of interesting or innovative new ideas. It has become common to complain how the papers in the highest ranked journals are generally uninteresting and irrelevant (eg. Willmott, 2010; Grey, 2010; Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). The only reason anyone has to consult this work is when they themselves want to write an article for a similar journal (Gabriel 2010). This presumably creates a tight circle of bored writers reading boring articles so they can write yet another boring article for other writers that need to look at these for their literature reviews. Perhaps many scholars would have preferred much the work they are expected to be familiar with and refer to not to be written at all so they would not be forced to read it in order to demonstrate their knowledge of the literature in the subfield.

One of reasons why reading journal articles can be so unappealing is that they have become documents of discipline. Rigorous compliance with standards is far more important than having something interesting or relevant to say. This is because the format of leading journals is similar to bureaucracy (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013). To be sure, increased bureaucracy creates many positive things: clear guidelines and rules, standardization of work, increased efficiency, development of specialized skills, smooth and predictable evaluation processes, the elimination of nasty surprises and anxiety limitation. But increased focus on formulaic papers has created many of the dysfunctions of bureaucracy: limited imagination and creativity, predictable products, a bureaucratic writing style, strong sub-specialization, the (over) exploitation of a limited 'competence', the evaluations based on tick-box processes. When researchers feel constrained by different rules and standards, they tend to play it safe by imitating what others have done – so called gap-spotting (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). All this limits the chances of unexpected, challenging and surprising ideas. As a result, articles in leading journals score high on rigor and incremental contribution, but they fail to say very much which is novel or make a strong social impact (Bartunek et al. 2006; Clark & Wright 2009).

We have produced a system where a reworked version of Winston Churchill's famous soundbite would seem apt: never before in human history have so many had so little to say to so few.<sup>1</sup>

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1 When Alvesson originally used this phrase at a large phrase in a panel discussion at EGOS, it received spontaneous applause from an audience of over 300 people. It clearly seemed to resonate with the mood in the Organisation Studies community in July 2015. Perhaps the phrase was made even more prescient because the conference was being held in Athens during a week when the banks were closed and tens of thousands of people were protesting on the street every evening. If you looked at the overwhelming majority of papers being presented, you would see little sign of the fact that many European economies were in deep financial crisis. This

Given this sad state of affairs, we should not be surprised at increasingly cynical comments make about their own field such as 'In general I see very few people doing work they think important for anything but the tenure and promotion treadmill' (senior academic), or 'there are more unqualified people pumping more crap into more unread outlets than ever before in history' (retired academic). Despite this fury, there seems to be kind of resigned acceptance that, in the words of one academic writing on an email list, 'the only thing that seems to count for every faculty is the churning out of endless streams of publications' (senior academic). The extent of this resignation is well captured by another UK based academic, who pointed out that:

'League-table-ism is not up for negotiation. As Aesop nicely points out for us, well, for me at least, the archer is entirely indiscriminate and has absolutely no regard for the eagles or the scrawny feathered among us, but we ourselves seemingly have no genuine collective will or even anything close to a shared view of how to resist. Why is that? (academic)

### **Explaining (over-)compliance**

What is surprising for us is not that the current bureaucratization of research has produced increasingly irrelevant and uninteresting research. We all know bureaucracy is boring. What is more puzzling is the strong over-adaptation to this system by academics themselves. One would expect that there might be a balance between the demands of journal system on the one hand and academic values on the other.<sup>2</sup> The journal system has many advantages but as with all systems it needs to be balanced with cultural orientations supporting good judgement, professional integrity and a strong sense of what is meaningful and relevant. This does not seem to have happened. Many academics have practically surrendered traditional academic values in favour of commitment to the discipline and instrumentalism of the journal system. As a result, a system aimed at measure and reward quality has been turned into a system of concertive control which academics enforce on each other (Barker 1993). The excessive focus on journal and journal lists may have been pushed from above by senior management keen on easy metrics. But it has also been enforced from 'below' by the academic community itself. We would like to ask how has this happened? Why is it that resourceful people who are supposed to be driven by a strong set of shared values, intrinsic motivation and are traditionally considered to be difficult to control have become compliant and (self)disciplining enforcers of a system they themselves think – or at least often say – is stupid? Or perhaps rather functionally stupid, i.e. is a

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strange disconnection between scholarship and reality was bought to a head during the evening conference dinner which was held on a finely manicured athletics fields half way between two huge street protests. When the protests ended, many of the activists passed by the athletics field and starred at the conference goers, who by this time were dancing to middle of the road music. The whole scene resembled an upscale summer wedding party.

- 2 An incomplete list of these in no particular order might include: Developing interesting and valuable knowledge, publishing one's work in a variety of format, emphasizing work and ideas rather than outputs, seeing intrinsic motives as more important than instrumental outcomes (like a pay rise and promotion)



disinclination to carefully consider meaningfulness or relevance or engage in critical reflection (Alvesson & Spicer 2012).

We think that existing ideas about power and control in organization studies may provide a useful guide to answer these questions. We will consider the interplay between four faces of power which are commonly found in organizations: *coercion* through hierarchy, *manipulation* and *mainstreaming* through agenda setting, *domination* through shaping accepted ideas and values and *subjectivation* through shaping accepted sense of self (Fleming and Spicer, 2007; Law 1978; Hardy 1994). In what follows, we look into each of these faces in some more depth and explain how they have driven (over) compliance.

### *Coercion through Hierarchy*

During recent decades there have been marked structural changes in the higher education sector. A central aspect of this has been marketization. Initially, this was driven by international competition and recruitment of overseas students. However, successive governments have raised student fees for nationals and changed policies to allow private providers into the sector. Over time this has created a fully fledged market in university education in some countries like the UK.

In addition to increasing market pressures, Universities have found themselves under intensifying pressure to complying with other 'institutionalized myths' (Meyer & Rowan 1977). To win wider legitimacy, they have to conform with widely shared assumptions about what a good organization should look like. This often involves emulating practices which can be found in other organisations. Some examples include showing they have strategic visions, human resource management systems, branding functions, are addressing diversity and so on. All this creates a pressure to add new functions to the university.

Marketization and the demand to comply with an every expanding range of institutional myths has driven a rapid expansion of administration in universities. Recent statistics show that administrative staff now outnumber faculty at over half of the UK's universities (Jump, 2015). At the London Business School, administrators make up 85% of the total employees. One U.S. based academic recently released a book in which he warned about the rise of the 'All administrative university' (Ginsberg, 2012). In it, he documents how between 1985 and 2005, the number of students in US universities had grown by 56%, the number of faculty increased by 50%, the number of administrators has grown by 85% and the number of administrative assistants grew by 230%. Looking at the difference between public and private universities is instructive. In public universities, the number of administrators grew by 66%. The figure was 135% in private universities. Contrary to popular belief, the level of bureaucratization of the public sector as a whole has actually increased with the marketization of sector (McSweeney 2006; Graeber, 2015). Indeed the institutions which are most exposed to market pressures (ie. Private sector institutions) also have the most bureaucracy (in the form of administrators). This reflects a continued de-emphasis on core practices in favour of managerialism, looking good and imitating others (and adopting a lot of functions irrelevant or even undermining good research and education).

The growth of administration has gone hand-in-hand with the increasing power of managers. A large managerial infrastructure has developed to control the expanding numbers of administrative staff. There has been a multiplication of academics mainly doing managerial work. One piece of evidence around this is the expansion of Deans in many universities. In his study of US academia, Ginsberg (2012) documents the expansion of the what he calls 'Deanlets' and 'dealings' – people appointed to associate or assistant Dean positions for all sorts of things from student experience to social media. As the number of managerial positions has expanded, the role of 'collegiate control' by the faculty of decision making has decreased. In an increasingly familiar account, Parker (2015) documents how the new Dean of one UK business school eliminated the entire committee system and centralized decision making power around himself. As a result most checks and balances to the Dean's power with the business school were eliminated. This left the Dean free to pursue increasingly strange courses of costly activity.

All this means that academic control is being significantly weakened. The rise of 'academic managerialism' means Deans now have legitimacy and formal power to make decisions about faculty activities based on research output. However these same Deans are in turn measure on the basis of various national or global standards – such as research rankings. In the UK for instance, many Deans and Vice Chancellors have parts of their pay tied to the performance of their institutions in the national research auditing exercise. They often do not necessarily approve of being exposed to what may be seen as competition and ranking based on simplified and arbitrary measures that invite manipulation. Non-the-less, they feel that they need to adapt (Sauder & Espeland 2009). In one UK business school, the Dean often begins his speech to various audiences by pointing out that he is a Statistician, so he knows how statistics can be made to lie. He then goes on to run through the various statistics showing the good performance of the school on a range of metrics.

Academics are by no means innocents. Deans have become dependent on what can sometimes be a small group academics who are deemed to be highly productive according to the criteria which many Deans distrust but nonetheless go along with. This reinforces the status and power base of those deemed to be high-performers. This at times small group has been able to transform their power into favorable conditions (such as lower teaching loads, plentiful conference budgets, no administration etc) and higher pay. This often means that what is seen as the academic elite are often disinclined to undermine managerialism – as they can sidestep many of the disadvantages and profit from the privileges of the system.

### *Manipulation and Mainstreaming through Agenda Setting*

The various ranking exercises have placed issues of research performance close to the top of the agenda in many Universities. This can be easily observed by the amount of time and resources which is spent on these issues – up to the highest levels of universities. In the past research was something which was discussed in the seminar room. During the past two decades, it has entered into the committee room in a big way. Indeed, there has been an explosion of discussion about 'research' and an expansion of the range of administrative forums (such as committee meetings) for this discussion to take place. 'Research' has become an increasing item for hallway discussion and gossip in universities. Within

scholarly communities there has been a curious shift in focus with the explosion of workshops focused on issues like 'how to publish', 'how to win grants' and 'how to achieve impact'. What is so striking about many of these discussions is that they are not about the actual content of the research as such. Instead, they focus on the more formalistic elements. For instance, during informal discussions, you can easily talk to a colleague about research for hours, hear long lists of names of journals and precise impact factors, but hear nothing about the actual content on the research which they are doing. Author biographies in journals are often dominated by a list of the journals in which the author has published.

All this highlights that 'research' (and a very particular formalistic definition of research which can be found in various ranking systems) has become a key agenda item. Challenging this agenda – for instance, by bringing up the harm a strong focus on journal publication in highly ranked journals can have – seems difficult. This is because the credibility of the existing agenda is, despite all the critique, fairly strong. Although many attribute this to the increasing strength of managerialism in the university, there is also a strong element of community control at work. Academics choose to talk incessantly with one another about their performance in research assessment activities. They have also played a role in pushing 'research' (in particular the formalistic elements of it) up the agenda of University committees. And after all, why wouldn't academic staff want to advance the importance of 'research' on the university's agenda? It is something which they are told incessantly is the most important, meaningful and rewarding part of the job. This all lends a certain degree of legitimacy to the whole issues which makes it difficult to argue against.

One way which those aiming to resist the formalistic 'research' agenda do so is through publishing journal articles pointing out the problems. As a result, there is an expanding body of journal publications in highly ranked journals which question the emphasis on journal lists, the current journal format, and so on. This is, of course, a glaring paradox here. You try to critique a form by using the very form which you are questioning. In some spheres of life this might be a very clever and subverse move indeed. In the business school, it is just another chance to add a line to the CV. Such attempts at resistance fuels the very institution which they are supposed to challenge and undermine. We should here add that we, the authors of this paper, is as guilty of this as many others. (We do, however, also work in other ways – internally within our institutions and in public debate to create changes in higher education.)

There are certainly other attempts to challenge the 'research' agenda. These may come in the form of attempts to reformulate the constitution of the agenda item (what counts as 'research'), or re-prioritise other agenda items (such as teaching, administration, public engagement etc). Often both these processes can prove to be difficult. A person who tries to question the priority of research might risk being marginalised as low-performers (according to 'research' based criteria) and therefore lacking credibility to challenge existing arrangements. Those who do benefit from current arrangements are probably going to be rather disinterested in changing an agenda they benefit from. In such contexts, credibility and motivation to complain usually contradict each other.

*Domination through shaping Norms and Values*

Most academics at least claim to loath strict regimes for assessing and thereby controlling their work. It is common to hear doubts about journal ranking lists, the REF, the '4 by 4' and so on. In fact, expressing these doubts is an important part of ongoing informal social interaction in UK universities. Such research assessment procedures are commonly seen as a manifestation of broader neo-liberal ideology within academic life. What is interesting is how this wider neo-liberal discourse is dealt with. Most actors do not find neo-liberalism particularly convincing on an intellectual level. Indeed, there are many academics who have made fine careers critiquing the failings of neo-liberalism. However, what is particularly interesting is how academics relate to this set of ideas. Anger seems to be matched with resignation. At least in the UK, neo-liberalism has progressively marginalised all other political discourses (such as social democracy and conservatism) during the past three or four decades. This has led UK academics to resigning themselves to it within their own professional sphere. They feel that all the battles have been lost, and they are not going to be won within the university. A routine script has become 'we know we are defeated, so we are quiet from the start'. Defeatism rules. This helps to legitimize compliance: it starts to be viewed as rather intelligent to adapt and be realistic. This leads to and legitimizes an 'ideology of opportunism': it is good to be realistic, to adapt conditions and be loyal with colleagues and institutions in manipulations so we will look good in assessments and rankings.

Although there may be a defeatist acceptance of neo-liberal ideas in Universities, there are other ideas which have been most positively and wholeheartedly embraced. These are often professional values which appeal to peak performances, elitism and 'excellence'. There is also the lure of academic celebrity. Being known, being read and being influential is clearly a central concern. High status knowledge has an international appeal. Cosmopolitanism ideologically outscores local orientations.

Alongside the allure of being seen as part of an international elite, there is also the appeal of some idea about accountability. Having considerable discretion and ample time to do research is strongly valued. This calls not just for a laissez-faire approach but a clear delivery of something that is perceived as a knowledge contribution. The quality check of the peer review here fits nicely. And it is very difficult to find an alternative to this. A boss review, pal review or a self-review are all inferior to the peer review for quality control, accountability, feedback and resource allocation in academia.

Grandiosity is also valued by academics. Expectations and demands are rising. More and more people want status and identity confirmation. Within post-affluent society and their accompanying culture of narcissism, there is a strong orientation towards rapid careers and more impressive titles (Alvesson 2013; Foley 2010). One place this can be seen in Universities is the explosion of the number of Professors. During the 1970s, there were 4,000 Professors in the UK. Now there are nearly 20,000. Promotions seem to be more common in business schools than in many other areas. In UK during the 1980's, leading academics could be lecturers for extended periods and expect promotion only after making significant contributions. Today, people with modest records of achievement expect much quicker progress, in particular in business schools. Some older staff members we have

spoken with claim it is probably easier to become a professor today than a senior lecturer 25 years ago. This signals and reinforces an ideological shift from more intrinsic values towards instrumental values like careerism, titles and wages. Most academics still express a degree of love for their work and its intrinsic value. However the increased salience of instrumental aspects reduce the importance of intrinsic aspects (Salancik & Pfeffer 1978). We have moved from meaning to motivation (Sievers 1986), from what is important and meaningful to what is being rewarded.

### *Subjectification through Shaping Selves*

The fourth key ingredient in the surrender of autonomy entails changes in how academics see themselves. An important aspect of this is the strange seductiveness of rankings, performance measurement and similar systems. What is so striking is that whilst academics are often unhappy, or even downright critical of these techniques, they also embrace and in some cases even revel in them. This can be clearly witnessed in a typical account of the REF. Usually such accounts start out by expressing disdain and pointing out the problems with the system. Then they switch to outlining the speakers own personal performance – or perhaps the performance of their institution. This creates a rather strange double think whereby academics both claim to loath the control system which they find themselves subjected to and also measure their own self worth in terms of it. In a sense we here have an outsourcing of meaning (Magala 2009), from associated with work to what is being evaluated and rewarded by others.

Such a compromised position might be seen as an outcome of a gradual process. Entering the Business School context itself often is seen to require certain compromises on the part of some academics. Here is how one Professor, with a critical/sociological orientation, puts it:

'Although perhaps changing now, many/most UK b-school professors - myself included - in some way started their academic careers by making a compromise or perhaps even in their own minds 'selling out'. The compromise, of course, was to work in a b-school in the first place rather than in a 'proper' subject field, perhaps in one of the social sciences (though also in some cases maths, history etc). So perhaps in having made this first compromise, we are then more willing and more adept at making further compromises. Perhaps we say to ourselves that 'we may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb'. Perhaps we imagine that we we will only compromise so far and no further but because the process of compromise happens gradually we never recognise when we have reached, or crossed, that line. Perhaps also we are resistant to recognising our compromises since we are innured by our first sell-out. Well, this becomes rather speculative of course, but the underlying fact of the background of UK faculty is not speculative even if its consequences are.'<sup>3</sup>

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3 Studies report that academics in economics are more inclined to maximize self-interest compared to their colleagues in humanities, social and natural sciences (Frank et al 1993). Presumably, business and management people often have a similar orientation as their colleagues in economics.

What is striking here is the contrast which is set up between the apparent purity or at least superiority of 'proper' disciplines (social science, history, maths are all mentioned) and the intellectually sullied space of the business school. Having to move from a more 'pure' object of identification (a proper discipline) to a much more questionable one (the business school) is experienced as the 'first sell-out' which may be followed by more.

There are further elements to this process of subjectification: publishing is often not just a form of intellectual work – it becomes a kind of identity work (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). When measured on the basis of outcomes, we find our naked and exposed self at stake. We are even more vulnerable when outcomes are crystalized through a numerical system and put on public display through something like Google Scholar. When this happens research publications start to be seen by oneself – and indeed others - as reflecting personal qualities such as intelligence, creativity, scholarship, efficiency, and commitment. This is exacerbated by the fact there is an element of choice involved in academia: People to a high degree choose their topic, research question, method, writing style, collaborations and where they attempt to publish their work. This means their work can be experienced as being more of an individual outcome. Named authorship which directly ties the work to the researcher further underlines this. As a result, publication becomes a way of working up a positive image of who you are. Failure to publish becomes not just a work issue, it becomes a wound on your self.

This creates a close to one-to-one relationship between a research outcomes (such as journal publications) and their sense of academic self. Although research depends on collective efforts, builds on tradition and is strongly influenced by feedback, it is nonetheless experienced as profoundly individual in nature. The identity regulatory effects of journal publishing and the entire process leading up to this becomes very strong. To see this, all you need to do is to take a look at the short biographies which academics include at the end of a publication. Usually, they spend half the space presenting themselves in terms of which journals have they published in. The narrative lurking behind this appears to be: I am the journals in which I have published in. Perhaps we are not far away from a situation where instead of listing degrees and professional qualifications after one's names, academics will start listing their publications. When this happens, academics might hand over business cards which read like this:

Max Manageman. (ASQ, AMJ, AMR, OS, JMS, HR).  
Research Professor.

Developments in technology are likely to further ratchet up public displays of achievement. Easily available information such as citation rates, H-scores and much more have created extremely high level of transparency and visibility. Within a few clicks, you can find a researcher's Google Scholar profile and assess their relative worth by looking at their H-score (even if you know absolutely nothing about their field). At many institutions now, when potential faculty are interviewed, the panel are given documents assessing their research performance using metrics such as the H-score. Some scholars have tried to smooth this process by just including their citation rates and H-scores at the top of their CV.

Maybe the next step will be just to write your H-score on the badge each academic wears at conference. In this way, everyone will instantly know whether you are worth talking with or not.

Yiannis Gabriel (2005) uses the metaphors of glass cage and glass palace to illuminate these kinds of hyper-transparent organisations. For him, these are organizations which are characterized by incessant visibility and constant surveillance. This arrangement, he points out, prompts a kind of exhibitionism where the occupants of transparent cages always put themselves on show and making a spectacle out of themselves. In the academic glass cage, your research outputs are rendered constantly visible – for all to see. But what is even more fascinating is that instead of waiting for authorities to see and assess them, many academics seem to scream out to be seen. To gain attention, they make a research spectacle out of themselves - constantly displaying their outputs in a way which is there for all to see. New technologies such as social media make this task much easier.

### *In Sum: Juggling Scripts*

The four faces of power we find at work in academic life overlap and reinforce each other. Coercive power such as commands from Deans to ‘publish or else’ do not work on its own. It could easily lead to powerful resistance. Direct instances of power need to be linked with a robust agenda around ‘research’ which is strongly supported by notions such as ‘research excellence’. In addition these values need to be linked in turn with strong forms of identity regulation and identity work. Perhaps the most interesting aspect is how this entire system has become so efficiently self-regulated and has seems to have largely produced complicit and committed participants who incessantly tell each other – and themselves - to focus on ‘what counts’: publishing in high ranked journals.

This produces selective neglect. Large swathes of academic life are overlooked. Teaching becomes seen as something to be avoided if possible and is often passed onto junior faculty or teaching-only staff. Administration becomes seen as a pesky interruption to be passed off to those with an interest in such matters. This of course creates perfect conditions for the further concentration of power and the dissolution of process of collegial control.

As well as creating neglect, the myopic focus on ‘research’ has also generated significant effort. Researchers plow thousands of hours their lives into ‘crafting’ articles for submission, dealing with reviews, networking and much more. In most cases, it means the academic working day extends far into the night. And what is the result of this great labour? A constant flow of articles, which are judged by an increasing number of academics to be pointless technical exercises which are uninteresting, make little in the way of real contribution and have no impact beyond marginally on a small group of specialists.

However, this is not just a story of overwhelming compliance. As we have already indicated, there seems to be constant shuttling between enthusiastic compliance and bitter complaint. At one moment the research complains about the unsavory effects of the overwhelming focus on research. The next moment, they are heading back to the desk for a long session working on their next journal article. An important part of this habitus seems to be the

ability to combine resistance and compliance; the romantic love of academic labour and cynical suspicion of it in the very same gesture. The question we would like to ask in the next section is how it is possible to combine these paradoxes demands.

## **Playing the Game**

Academics – like other people working in complex settings – must be able to dealing with contradictions and paradox (Magala, 2009). They should be able to shuttle between compliance and resistance; a romanticised love of their labours and a cynical suspicion of them. Each position offers a well established scripts. When speaking from the compliant script, they claim 'I am (or hope/want/expect to be) a 4 by 4 person'. Then the resistance script comes out, and the line becomes: 'I'm against this whole system, I'm only pretending to comply.' The romantic script claims: 'I love my work'. And the cynic finishes it off by sneering: 'I see through all the crap'.

Holding fast to one of these scripts leads to difficulties. Relentless compliance can turn you into a clone. Constant resistance can create big push back from authority figures. Always being romantic about your work can break your heart. Cynicism can dry up the last ounces of belief. To avoid these problems, academics learn to juggle different scripts. The well adapted person can blend and balance. They can express one attitude in an academic seminar while discussing a paper, another in a department meeting when looking at performance metrics, a third in the pub as they complain to a colleague, and something entirely different when they are at home offloading onto a spouse. Such blending and juggling scripts is tough. How exactly do academics cope?

We think an important way to help juggling these contradictions is to see work as a 'game' and see oneself as player. If you listens to even just a small sample of academics talking about their work and the pressures which are put upon them, you will be struck by just how frequently this metaphor is used. A recent study of UK academics found gaming to be a commonly used metaphor. Producing journal publications for the REF was seen as 'playing the game'. Butler & Spoelstra (2012) conclude that 'many of our respondents admitted that they put a great deal of work into tailoring their paper to the meet the expectations of editors and reviewers.' (p 894). They also suggest that the game tends to master its players, rather than the other way around. Some commentators say that management scholars 'now have more capital in gaming skills than in scholarship' (Macdonald and Kam, 2011: 472)

Why is it that self-declared critics are so fond of such a frivolous metaphor when talking about their 'calling'? Perhaps the central advantage is that by seeing themselves as a 'player' who participates in a 'game' one is able to develop some kind of distance and reduce one's commitment to any particular script. You don't need to be completely compliant or resistant. Nor do you need to be either utterly romantic or thoroughly cynical. All you need to be good at is playing the game. If you are a player, you can put aside any serious questions about the contradictions which you face. Instead, you can focus on honing one's skills at playing the game. What is even more striking is that by seeing the whole undertaking as a game, a professional can imagine that they are not at all reducible to the game. Instead they are somehow apart from it or superior to it. They can also harbour the



fantasy they can step away from the game and leave when they might want.

On the face of it, 'playing the game' seems to be what many people do. It allows them to preserve some energy, commitment and perhaps their sense of self for other things. Playing indicates a pragmatic response, not any deeper compliance to any particular script. Moreover, it can help to preserve the idea that beneath or beyond player there is a non-playing self. Academics can also legitimize their own involvement and compliance by pretending that they really 'see through it all' and therefore have an autonomous standing on the subject matter (Fleming & Spicer 2003; Kunda 1992)

The idea that you are 'playing' adds a dimension of awareness: it feeds the idea that the player stands above the game and are not a sucker. Instead they exhibit a meta-understanding. Butler & Spoelstra (2012), for instance, point out that 'Critical management scholars therefore 'play the game' at the same time as they condemn its rule or lament its consequences' (p 898). The successful person playing the game smoothly interacts with performance management and is rewarded accordingly. Yet they also are able to distance themselves from this by doing a fair amount of identity work which bolsters a sense of self that is not too blemished. The game playing romantic who engages in a little minor resistance and lots of compliance seems to be the formula for success.

The game playing metaphor may appear as an entirely subjective response, but it needs to be understood in relationship to other forces of power. The game is not chosen, but imposed by hierarchy and agenda setting. These forces offer rules and constraints. 'You have to ...' is part of the metaphor. It is a game you are forced to play. These rules, however, are constructed as somewhat flexible and soft, for the game player. Of course, people don't say 'play the game' if they face or fear losing their jobs. Ideologies offer strong cultural support for game playing.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have addressed the issue of how academics, more specifically business school academics, have responded to the rise of managerialism. There is, of course, much variation, but compliance seems to be a common, if not, dominant response. We think this is rather unexpected. One would assume that a high status group with a strong work commitment would be difficult to change. In fact it appeared to be quite the opposite. The growing body of research on business schools suggests many academic have been active (although not particularly willing) participants in the process. We see this as a mystery, and we have set out to ask why.

To begin to address this mystery, we turned to work on power. In particular, we argued that the (un)conditional surrender of professional autonomy can be explained by looking at the role which power plays. Clearly exercises of coercive power in the form of increasing managerial hierarchy, the use of incentives such as bonuses for publication and increasingly punitive punishments for 'non performance' have been important. But this would not have worked if it wasn't backed up by a particular conception of research rising rapidly to the top of the agenda of both formal and informal discussions in universities. This has been

further underpinned by a defeatist acceptance of neo-liberal ideas, which are then combined with other 'traditional' academic values such as competition, excellence as well as a wider desire for grandiosity. All this was made personal as research work has morphed into identity work. It has been further reinforced by new technologies which can immediately make ones research performance visible.

However, this is not a straight forward story of compliance. Through-out we have noted that academics seem to shuttle between apparently opposites: compliance and resistance, love of academic labour and cynical loathing of it. To manage this complex identity juggling act, many academics see their working lives as a 'game' which needs to be 'played'. This creates a certain distance from the often very difficult roles which they have to take on. Perhaps this makes the constant juggling a little easier to bare. It also makes things easier for their organizations to manage their employees. The only problem is that it has created a glut of research which is uninteresting and says little of significant to a larger audience.

What this suggests that if we are indeed serious about creating scholarship which is both more interesting and more engaging, then simply demanding academics start being interesting and engaging is unlikely to work. Instead, we need to look at the deeper power relations at work within universities that reproduce much of uninteresting and irrelevant research. Of course there is a need to change rewards and punishments to ensure academics are encouraged to produce work which goes beyond a narrow list of journals. Writing research-based texts for a larger audience seem vital. There is also the need to rethink the increasing creep of managed bureaucracy within universities which has in turn produced much bureaucratized research.

Interventions need to go beyond these obvious aspects. There are also needs for a re-evaluation of the official and unofficial agenda within universities. This might involve asking whether putting 'research' (or at least a certain vision of it) near the top of university agendas is actually doing research any good. Is it actually creating lots of talk about research and less action? Furthermore, we may need to revisit some of the deeper values under-girding research activities. For instance is a defeatist attitude still warranted? Should other values be revived beyond 'academic excellence', or should these core values be revived in different way?

Another pressing question is whether the current kind of identity work which is so closely attached to publication is actually very healthy. Does it create mindless research robots? Ineffective resisters? Heart-broken research lovers? Bitter cynics? Perhaps another version of the academic subject needed. If we think this is the, we need to ask how might these new subjectivities might created? For instance, what kinds of socialisation processes might be needed instead of a stodgy diet of top tier journal articles, three paper theses and endless series of 'how to publish' workshops which PhD students currently subsist on?

However, we think that the most pressing question is whether it is possible to think about academic work as not being a game. Maybe it is time to call 'game-over'. One simple step is to set up a charity fund in each department and charge five euros each time someone says 'you have to play the game'.



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There are many cases of business schools sacrificing traditional activities (like teaching and research) to take on a wide range of apparently un-related roles. One UK business school offers a master's programme which is specially designed for people who are un- or under-employed. The programme mainly involved organizing internships for students. The hope was that it created some job-relevant training, fostered contacts with employers, and increased the likelihood of landing a job. All these things are of course laudable goals. The only issue is not that much higher education was involved. Students had to complete a report about their experience which was submitted as a Masters thesis. But in reality, the master programme was then basically a disguised job placement agency. Helping students with their job search is certainly a feature of higher education. But turning it into a major feature of their Master programme is another matter altogether.

Another institution, which had an excellent reputation (because it was part of a top university), spent about a third of its teaching resources on preparing students for job applications and, in particular, job interviews. This meant that the graduates were very skilled in impression management and could negotiate a high salary. As official rankings are partly based on the graduates' pay relatively soon after they qualify, this made it easier for the school to come out as a top provider of degrees in their field. And students willing to pay high fees could be recruited, since they could see that this was a "good investment" which really improved their career. When asked about this, the Dean could not see anything wrong with this strategy.

Another business school prepared for a ranking based on an assessment of the research performed by removing some low-performing faculty from the website and temporarily moving others to units where their low research output was expected to do least harm.

Instead of ensuring students are given a challenging and meaningful education, many universities have become increasingly focused on improving their ranking in various global lists of the best universities. To do this, they focus on producing a high output of articles which can be counted in various audit exercises. Usually putting much resources and energy into teaching is not prioritized.

### Education: making money and boosting credentials

Developed countries often claim they have become knowledge societies. Any important part of this is widespread celebration of higher education. The quantitative expansion of higher education is remarkable. Just 3.4% of young people in the UK went on to higher education in 1950. In 2011 that number was 49%. Other developed countries have seen similar massive quantitative expansions. In 1940, less than 5% of people had a college degree in the US. Today the number is over 20%. 35.7% of Europeans between the ages of 30 and 35 have participated in higher education. University education has also globalized. In 2009, there were about 150 million university students in the world.

As numbers have continued to expand, some suspect quality has suffered. Many students in today's universities seem to be there with little or no interest in the topics which they are

being taught. Attending lectures is largely a chance to check Facebook (Sorensen, 2014). In many cases, the subjects which are on offer are not exactly what one might hope as preparation for the kind of critical reasoning which universities are supposed to offer. Universities now offer classes on subjects like Beyoncé, David Beckham, Zombies and Star wars. While it might be easy to ignore a few quirky courses in Media studies degrees, what is more striking is the emergence of entire fields of study in areas which were once learned on the job in a few days. You can now take entire degree courses in bar tending. But what is most striking is that students actually seem to learn little while they are at university. One recent US study by Arum and Roksa (2011) of over 3000 undergraduate students at 29 colleges found that after the first two years, 45% of students had showed no significant gains in learning. At the completion of their degree, after a full four years of study, 36% of students had learned little or nothing. In some cases, attending University pushed students backwards. Business students actually performed worse in their first few years of University than they had done in high school.

The particularly poor performance of business schools in educating their students should come as no surprise. They are often cash cows by universities. They are seen as offering mass education with often questionable qualifications. One UK professor expressed this sentiment when he told us that 'an MBA from a British business school is not worth the paper of the degree'. He corrected this slightly, pointing at a few places being exceptions. But the implication seemed to be that in large majority of cases an MBA said little about the quality of the graduates. Lecturers in UK business schools often complain about the large number of overseas students they teach who have a poor knowledge and mastery of English.

One would assume a functioning higher education systems would be characterized by reasonably high demands for admission, demanding content and examination and assessment which guarantees a high level of knowledge and ability. Exactly what this means is hard to say. But it is clear that a focus on the 'business' aspects of business school is much more pronounced than the 'school' aspects.

Intellectual and occupational qualification – high volumes of intake and throughput, student satisfaction, and, above all, the generation of money to provide the university with a cash cow and fund high wages, good promotion possibilities and fringe benefits (like academic tourism in the form of sabbaticals, conference trips and other forms of academic tourism).

UK business schools are, of course, not unique in partly sacrificing their original purpose and integrity for the benefit of scoring well in the rankings, thereby maximizing their visibility and status. In many places in the world, including the US, the ratio of teaching and administrative staff has changed significantly, and there are many posts that focus exclusively on facilitating students' careers, e.g. "Credential Specialist and Vice President for Student Success" (Piereson, 2011). Much of this is directly focused on improving the student's options in zero-sum games in the labour market. Parts of this is outside the range of academics' control, but they (we) seem to accept a downgrading of meaning and purpose for material and status benefits and the comfort of adaptation and compliance, also with HE regimes alien to academic and professional ideals.

All this focus on ranking and careers may be fine from the point of view of the students who instrumentally benefit from this, but it means an intensifying of zero-sum games, since manipulating in order to improve rankings, boosting the students' CVs and preparing for job interviews does not add to job qualifications or the social good - only that someone may be better at getting ahead of others in the line of job applicants. All this adds nothing to what higher education is supposed to accomplish: people who can contribute with their intellectual skills and knowledge to their lives, jobs, and society as a whole, as good citizens. It only means that positional goods competition takes a purely 'non-productive' turn (Alvesson 2013). There is no benefit apart from the maximization of self-interest and positionality at the expense of others. When rankings and credentials are based on "true" performances, which are contingent upon the number of resources that have been used for teaching, salaries tend to be a better reflection of capacity. A degree from a specific institution then provides considerable information about the knowledge and intellectual quality of a graduate and fulfils a productive and valuable role. Position-competition based on "true quality" is often valuable. Ambitious rankings that do not look at easily-manipulated and misleading criteria, but at gained qualifications can be a productive force that improves teaching. But there are plenty of examples of clear deviations from this, leading to pure zero-sum games, where efforts to improve come at the direct expense of others, pushed further down in the job applicant line. Competition then drives not better performances, but better faking (e.g. CV boosting). While this can be blamed on government, university or school management or 'the world', academics are the key group in universities and can't escape responsibility.

Here are a few recent episodes that at least for a person with more traditional academic and intellectual orientations appear as highly surprising:

1. Approaching a mid-career level colleague for participation in a joint book project lead the person to ask the mentor for advice. The mentor warned against writing book chapter as less good for the career and suggested concentrating on journal publication. The colleague, who earlier had expressed a strong interest in the collaboration, came back and indicated that s/he should probably not be able to participate in any other collaboration than journal publication.
2. On the flight between two conferences – one of these was a CMS one – one of the authors met a colleague and asked him about what he was working on. I had the intellectual project in mind, but he started by referring to names of the journals for which he was busy revising papers, then continued with referring to the UK Research Assessment Exercise, saying that he already had sufficient publications, but that he got extra rewards from the dean if he scored above what was needed. After all this he mentioned the content of the research work he was doing.
3. In a talk with a person with a senior position he complained about the 'horrible' situation in UK, including pressure for publication, accept more students, etc. Asking about protests and/or perhaps writing about the situation triggered a more optimistic tone: 'well if you have your 4 by 4 articles, then you can do what you want and it is not really that bad, actually'.

There is now a rising feeling that published organizational research must change and



seek to say something socially relevant, to show concern for social problems and human suffering (Adler & Hansen, 2012) and/or to be relevant and actionable by managers and management students (Pearce & Huang, 2012). There are endless complaints of high status journals and what is accepted for publication, and as the experienced pressure is to primarily publish in these one would expect much resistance and non-compliance.

Of course this is a complex set of issues, but the complaints that academics are more interested in getting published in the right outlets than having something relevant to say is noteworthy and can in part be attributed to strong compliance with regimes emphasizing onesidedly publications in highly ranked journals. To publish in these are fine – but it is surprising to hear so many people having been discouraged from writing books or book chapters. One would perhaps assume that working with a variety of formats, being in line with different knowledge contributions, some of which would be best expressed in book-length texts, would be the overall norm. In particular, one would assume that support for innovative and influential research would be a top priority for most B schools. But pumping out journal papers seem to be the overall guideline, one to which the majority of academics subscribe, perhaps oversubscribe.

. Many people seem to reason as if Gulag (disgrace or poverty) waited if a minor drop in journal publication output and/or ranking of the school would occur. But the material and symbolic effects of a change in ranking appear to be moderate, if not marginal.

There are off the shelf explanations, e.g. the system is easy for deans to control/managerialism, market logic, new public management being triumphant, capitalism has defeated social democracy etc. Something more interesting and novel probably remains to be said.

It is often claimed that it is difficult to manage professionals. Key characteristics are autonomy, self-governance, stronger loyalty and identification with the profession than with employers. Many managers have said that managing a professional service firm is like 'herding wild cats' (Löwendahl 1997:63). A VC at a Swedish university some years ago gave a talk with some emotion emphasizing that 'the organization need to be improved. We must make sure that decisions are implemented. In can't be so any longer that decisions are treated as arguments in a debate'. In a traditional university spirit, the latter attitude still tends to dominate at many places. One asks for good arguments, not for instructions for how to perform better in a measurement system. Most academics, even in B-schools, claim that they have a strong love for their vocation and work (Clarke et al 2012), implying a downgrading of instrumental orientations. In the light of this and internationally communicated cultural ideals and expectations, the rather farreaching compliance in Uk business schools (and at other places as well) is of some interest to explore.

Of course, the empirical picture is varied and there are plenty of examples of resistance

in one sense or another, including somewhat ironically publishing articles in top journals about the dangers of journal lists and journal publishing (e.g. Willmott 2011). Still, there are still strong indications of a very high level of compliance amongst many people in key respects such as the downplaying of educational values for the boosting of CV's and job placement functions and, above all, giving a strong priority to doing and publishing research in ways that is prescribed and rewarded by their institutions, and then adjusting scholarly ambitions accordingly. One thing that is reasonable for an academic with time for research every 5<sup>th</sup> year or so being able to demonstrate four good research contributions, another thing is that this leads to the acceptance of 'only 4 star journal publications count' as a self-evident guideline. How can this be understood?

There is a strong institutional/collective interest in making sure that all are contributing to the glory and status of the institution. Managerial and organizational peer pressure are then in harmony, making it difficult for the individual not to 'contribute'. There is thus a collective, as much as managerial control, behind the use of coercive or first face power to accomplish compliance.

It is here important also to bear in mind the political macro level, also feeding into everyday academic life and local decisions, in addition to what directly follows from assessment arrangements, rankings and resource allocation. Many countries, but perhaps within Europe UK in particular inhabits a polity in which in a broad sense neo-liberalism - and its managerialist handmaiden - has marginalised all other political discourses (social democratic, conservative) in a way that is less true of at least other European countries. This perhaps leads UK academics in particular to be resigned to having to compromise: all the battles have been lost, and they are not going to be won within university business schools. People disliking the changes probably often think that 'We know we are defeated and so we are quiescent from the start'. Defeatism in some respects rules and this legitimizes compliance and opportunism as it is viewed as stupid not to adapt and be realistic. Such a mega discourse then ideologically fuels into and strengthens the force of the machinery, viewed as very powerful.

The fact that academics themselves seem to be supporting the 'research' agenda - as well as the

The elements of cooptation are hard to resist: peer review both in journal publication and in the research assessments create and maintain a very strong concertive control effect (Barker 1993). A self-built prison may be more difficult to escape than one others have put you into. It is, on the whole, academics that have decided that these and these journals represent key outlets used as trustworthy indicators of high level research.

There are some efforts to raise critical discussions, affecting the agenda, but often with an emphasis on moaning and groaning, with limited constructiveness. A problem is that with the heavy expansion of HE and the pressure of the institutions being

research based, there is an explosion of academics wanting to get published and, in order to meet the demand, a surplus of founding of new journals. Some kind of differentiation is probably unavoidable, to aid universities and research foundations in decisions of hiring, promoting, allocating research grants etc.

The Business School environment also incorporate large groups of researchers socialized into technical or utilitarian orientations such as financial economists. It is interesting to note that business schools has

– most notably a particular brand of economists. It is interesting to note that business schools have not always been

Studies report that academics in economics are more inclined to maximize self-interest compared to their colleagues in humanities, social and natural sciences (Frank et al 1993). The overall setting is then dominated by subjectivities and norms advocating orientations responsive to instrumental rewards, forming cultural orientations and work logics also incorporating people with a strong 'labour of love' (Clarke et al 2012) and perhaps inclined to develop less compromise-willing orientations in other academic contexts. 'Selling out' as a strong anti-identity become weakened in favor of one being pragmatic and 'perform well as measured and fairly rewarded accordingly' identity trajectory.

In a sense all work performances and successes is connected back to personal qualities. However in academia, like in sports, the situation can be experience as more naked. In business, the contributions and results of individuals are seldom accomplished in splendid isolation but linked up in a web of complications, dependencies and collaborations. Choices are often limited. Results are often mainly contingent upon your industry, economic life-cycle, exchange rates and competitor moves than an individual employee's or manager's brilliance. On the more local level, most people in business work together with a variety of people, units, etc and the outcome is often not easy to assess and can seldom easily be traced to one person (Jackall 1988).

A drawback with most easily available information in many knowledge-intensive contexts is its notorious unreliability. Numbers of results often say very little, particular in many non-commercial contexts, like social work, health care, education, making new public management difficult to operate effectively. In research numbers are, however, tightly tied with outcomes of peer assessments. This means that the key numbers carry a degree of credibility. People may resist journal lists, but on the whole it is difficult to deny that they are anchored in the entire peer assessment system and it is difficult to discredit one's profession and its institutions, almost entirely self-governed. Few people would say that journal lists, less official rankings and citation scores are perfect, but on the whole they carry a fairly high level of credibility and are persuasive as they are simply reinforcing broadly accepted views

of journal quality. Most people think that there is tendency that high level research work tend to be published in highly ranked journals and be quoted extensively. Even radical skeptics acknowledge that others take highly ranked seriously.

Playing the game comes with risks such as having valued identities undermined. Being an instrumental cynic is bad as this would reducing commitment & motivation and lower chances of accomplishing something. Is it really possible to see one's work as playing the game and then put in endless long working days into all the work? Given signs on commitment and great disappointment, even bitterness and anger, when the game does not end with a satisfactory outcome among many academics (also in tenured positions) indicates that the playing the game is not capturing the whole of what the RCRC is doing.

An additional indicator of this game-playing being quite partial emerges from interviews of academics about their labour. Many people also express deep love and commitment to their work, claim to be very serious about teaching and research and come out as romantics more than cynical game-players (Clarke et al 2012).

Of course it is possible that the game-players found by Butler & Spoelstra (2012) and the romantics that were interviewed by Clarke et al refer to different segments of the b school population, but it is perhaps more likely that roughly the same folks express different positions. There are then different possibilities. One being that the game players are 'really' romantics, another that the romantics are 'really' game players. The former would then only do marginal things to adapt to requirements, the latter would perhaps believe they are doing important work, while doing all the major moves in order to get published and then sacrifice the genuine commitment to an important cause during the process.

Better is possibly to think about different elements or levels of gaming. Multi-level gaming or back and forth-positions are two options. These involve the foregrounding and backgrounding of different elements.

Playing the game then can be viewed as something that (barely) masks another project: *playing the game of playing the game*. In other words, most academics are engaged in what they are doing, and feels quite serious about what they are doing. But this feeling of commitment and romanticism can be distorted by the strong elements of control and instrumentalism. People can be both pushed and seduced into the corresponding subject position. This can lead to a degree of unease. Playing the game idea offers some aid in the regulation of all this. Occassionally people may be quite cynical and be 'really' into playing the game. But when this happens, they loose sight of meta-play, i.e. playing or pretending that they are (only) playing the game. Through meta-play they can resist (they like to think) and can use this as an excuse for being sucked into the work and comply (Fleming & Spicer 2003; Kunda 1992). They are cynical and can thus avoid the pain and costs of following any urge to resistance. But after all they are compliant and reproduce and reinforce (exploit and benefit from) the system they play they strongly distance themselves from.

and incentives has played a role

Simple explanations, such as the strength of the managerialist regime, seem insufficient. Minimally, one can add that a more fine-tuned understanding of the rather high level of compliance can lead to additional insights to broad-brushed explanations.

Broadly, the following ingredients seem to have brought strong adaption and compliance in (UK) b schools:

- The business school environment: there is selective recruitment and socialisation into material forms of selfishness/money, meaning that the inclination of 'selling out' (traditional ideals of scholarship) is more pronounced than in other areas
- Seductiveness of excellence and appeal, competition and ranking triggering a lust to compete and compare and show one's worth
- Rationality of performance measurement – the irresistibility of the peer review, being legitimate
- Effective surveillance system provided by modern technology, making performance highly visible, creating a strong class cage effect
- The material rewards involved in commercially oriented B schools with high scores on research output, high ranking leads to affluence of resources leading to quick promotion and high wages.

Although these points may give us the broader picture a more finetuned understanding calls for how individuals and groups operate in a context where the complaints about the system and changes are abundant and any strong sense of scholarship would call for protests and resistance. One could say that a 'real' scholar is very disinclined to adapt to a 4 by 4 success formular, in particular when there is a rather negative view of what the journals publish. Of course this is not to say that the demand of demonstrating research output of high quality is unreasonable, but it could be in the form of books or a single contribution that is outstanding – something that academics today seldom seems to try, as they prefer modest and safe work with predictable outcomes (Courpasson 2013).

One way of understand this is the point at four major subject positions: resisting compliant romantic-cynic (RCRC). Contemporary academic cultures suggest some mastery and use of all of these. Identity constructing processes aiming to preserve a strong sense of scholarly self with a high level of prescribed performance calls for smoothness. One important resource here is the

The only problem however is that most academics are probably rather serious about their work. Often they talk about it as labour of love. To deal with this simultaneous closeness and distance, meta-play is important. One plays as if it is matter of game-playing. It is often quite serious work, there are strong feelings associated it. In order to deal with this serious side but also give some flexibility to move in and out of the game playing, meta-play is needed. This moving between the resister, the romantic,

the compliant and the cynic. Through combining and decoupling these subject positions, game playing allows individual academics to justify to oneself a high level of compliance and a loss of professional autonomy.