The Relevance of Managerialism to Higher Education: A Study of the Performance Planning, Appraisal and Development Scheme at the City University of Hong Kong

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Abstract

Faced with a wide range of political, economic and social problems, the public sector of the USA, UK and most European countries have been restructured towards a managerial approach. Managerialism or New Public Management can be seen as an ideology underpinning the changes in the public sector (including higher education) in recent years. Pollitt (1990) argues that there are two models of managerialism, namely, Neo-Taylorism or hard managerialism, and the new or soft managerialism. The former one is influenced by 'economic rationalism', a domination of the language and logic of economy such as efficiency gains, 'doing more with less', 'value for money' and quantifying performance for measurement. It is also a belief that the solution to all economic and social problems lies in the science of management. The latter one is however more people centred and stresses corporate culture, leadership, staff's commitment and motivation. Pollitt (1990) argues that while the soft managerialism provides the rhetoric for the changes, it is the hard model that is being practised in the public sector management.

The influence of managerialism is confined not only to the government sector but also the higher education sector which has experienced phenomenal changes in the past decade. The process of the change can be described as 'managerialisation'. With specific reference to the Performance Planning, Appraisal and Development Scheme (PPAD) for academic staff at the City University of Hong Kong, this study is set against this wider context to examine the relevance of managerialism to higher education. The specific objectives of the study are to critically examine the impacts of the managerial approach in higher education and evaluate its effectiveness in improving the 'quality' of higher education. The researcher has identified five major aspects of the managerial approach in higher education. They include (1) linking rewards and funding to performance; (2) emphasis on performance in terms of quantifiable and measurable outputs; (3) strict management control, (4) corporatization and marketization, and (5) the use of soft managerial approach. These five elements are embedded in the PPAD scheme but the researcher finds that they have little or only marginal impacts on the performance of academic staff. It is also found that managerialism has only contributed to an instant increase of productivity in research and a compliance instead of commitment to the requirements of the external scrutiny mechanisms. However, in the long run it may lead to a genuine decline in quality in both research and teaching. It may also bring about other problems such as demoralization, lack of commitment, increased individualism and competition which will eventually undermine the quality of higher education.
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