How to kill a research culture in its tracks.

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Abstract : *Sometimes the facetious provides more insight than reasoned argument. Moss-Kanter (1983) provided a good example when she listed tongue-in-cheek advice to managers as to how to stifle innovation and court organisational stagnation. By implication fostering innovation and growth meant enacting the contrast of the advice given. After fourteen years participant-observation of attempts to establish sustainable research cultures the current author provides a similar tongue-in-cheek account of actions and events that prevent rather than enable research that works in flourishing research cultures. By implication research that works comes from creating the contrasting environment.*

Sometimes facetious and tongue-in-cheek messages are better remembered and have more impact than a well reasoned scholarly piece. Management guru Rosabeth Moss-Kanter (1983) produced such a message with her "Ten rules for stifling Innovation." The topic of Moss-Kanter's book was how to become a master of managing change and innovation. In a tongue-in-cheek way Moss-Kanter provided a recipe for stifling innovation, thus courting organisational stagnation and organisational inability to change. An unstated assumption to managers was that behaving in a manner in direct contrast to Moss-Kanter's ten rules should foster innovation and change. The Dilbert books and comic strips on management provide a similar message (Adams, 1996, 2000,). Even leadership experts Kouzes & Posner (2004) have referred to the popularity of Dilbert as testimony for the need for changes in leadership and management behaviours. This paper attempts a similar tongue-in-cheek, facetious account of research which it is hoped will not only amuse readers but also be especially memorable for them.

The mission set for Research Coordinators, Research Leaders and Research Managers in the Institute of Technology/Polytechnic (ITP) sector maybe something like: Establish and sustain a vibrant research environment. Following fourteen years participant-observation of this quest it occurred to the current author that rather than being knowledgeable in achieving this mission, he had instead acquired an acute expertise in knowing how to do the direct opposite - how to kill a research culture in its tracks. Maybe the quest for our mission lies in the contrast of what follows:

1. Show no commitment for research from the top. In fact, resentfully treat research as an unwelcome "monkey on your back" that siphons resources away from your main intention – to meet financial targets. Criticize degree programmes for bringing research to your shores.

2. Mystify research. Use a very narrow and ambitious definition of what constitutes research, and certainly don't allow for the broad and encompassing definitions of NZQA or the PBRF. Make the expectations unclear and ambiguous. Above all, make sure the impression you give is that the expectations exceed the knowledge and capability of those expected to do the research. Just when research is becoming demystified – bring in new managers who do not understand the environment and who demystify it again. This makes establishing a vibrant research culture like climbing a very very steep and long sand hill – one step forward and two-thirds of a step back!
3. Ensure many different and incompatible "agenda" compete for attention and control of the research environment and research programme.
4. When you have staff lay-offs ensure that you get rid of the most prolific producers of research outputs (there is an un-stated assumption that they must be the worst teachers).
5. Ignore the advice and opinion of your experts who know about, who have read about and who have networked with others concerning the establishment of vibrant research cultures. In fact, ignore them completely. Keep them completely in the dark and don't even provide them with information about what is going on.
6. Increase workloads of degree teaching staff members in the following ways:
    a. Invoke the upper limits of class contact hours in the Workload Policy and thereby increase teaching loads by one-third. When staff members complain they cannot do research because of the workload, hold up the Workload Policy as the governing authority and quote directly the applicable clauses from that policy.
    b. Increase staff:EFTS ratios without establishing an upper limit. Just let it continue to climb.
    c. Increase the administrivia that teaching staff members must do. Produce more forms for them to fill, more signatures required on everything they do, more monthly status reports and more meetings to attend.
    d. Increase the number of courses that staff members teach at any one time – and make them "examiner" or "coordinator" of as many as possible.
    e. … and ensure that you then tell staff members that they are lazy, always tell them their enrolments are poor and continually threaten them with further layoffs.
7. Irritate your best researchers so that they find employment elsewhere and leave…. Then don't replace them, thus escalating the workload issues (as in 6, above).
8. If you do recruit new staff members make very sure that they do not have a post-graduate degree. If they have then certainly make sure they have not completed a masters or doctoral research thesis. If per chance you do employ someone with a doctorate and research experience then employ them as a junior academic staff member, not a senior or principal academic, and treat them as your most junior staff member. (This will probably lead to No. 7, above).
9. Place pre-emptive and tight, constraining controls on availability and release of research funding. Make it difficult to get hold of.
10. Narrow the scope of projects that research funding is available for. In fact confine it only to the material expenses involved in carrying out fieldwork.
11. Ensure researchers do not have the physical facilities that they require to do research. Make sure scientists do not have laboratories, make sure artists do not have studios and darkrooms, make sure that writers have the poorest quality computers, make sure nobody has analytic and bibliographic software and make sure you deplete the resources and facilities available in your library (including the world-wide library).
12. Appoint people to research committees who don't really understand research and who cover for their incompetence by being nit-picky in their scrutiny of research applications and who treat applications for small funding to do technical development, or small scale

case study research, as if they were applications for over a quarter-of-a-million dollars and with serious ethical issues to be resolved. In other words always be far too serious about these research applications and spend far too much time scrutinizing them.

13. Never approve a research application as it is. Always either send it back for amendments or approve it with several conditions attached.
14. Take a transactional approach. Treat research outputs as a return on investment of research funding provided and never accept that a "publishable" research output is good enough as the return on investment. Always demand additional return on investment and ensure the "return" is perceived by the researcher as inequitable compared to their effort, their expertise, their outputs and the actual level of funding received.
15. Build in internal tensions and jealousies:
    a. Make sure researchers and departments become competitive and adopt win-lose approaches for funding, prowess, favouritism and reputation. Make sure though that researchers and departments proclaim that they are cooperative but don't allow this to actually occur. Cooperativeness in name only.
    b. Make sure you have favourites on the one hand and others that you exclude dismissively on the other hand. For example ensure you favour the research interests of some Schools or Departments and neglect others.
    c. Foster internal tensions and jealousies between non-degree and degree teachers such that those required to do research receive criticism from their peers rather than their support.
16. Ensure that research applications go through at least eighteen or more steps, handled by as many different people between the time the researcher submits the research application and the time they receive the funding. Make sure there are built in delays to the process. This can be achieved by making it ambiguous which people have responsibility for some of the steps, or by making it so convoluted that those responsible get confused and simply forget that they were supposed to do something (like write a letter to the researcher, or open an account for their funding).
17. Unilaterally and dogmatically impose research themes and schemes.
18. Discourage and disable networking and participation in academic and professional communities. This can be achieved by outlawing attendance at conferences and trips to other institutions.
19. Divert staff research attention and energy towards some sort of crisis such as marketing one's department or programme in the face of a drop in enrolments.
20. Make sure those people in control have read Rosabeth Moss-Kanter's "ten rules for stifling innovation" (Moss-Kanter, 1983 p. 101) and Peter Senge's (1990) "organisational learning disabilities" so that they can then apply these to the research effort. These , edited and adapted for "killing a research environment dead," are….

Rosabeth Moss-Kanter's 10 rules for stifling research innovation

1. Regard any new idea from below, about invigorating the research environment, with suspicion - **because** it is new and because it is from below.
2. Insist that people who need approval to do research first go through several other levels of management to get their signatures.
3. Ask departments or individuals to challenge and criticize each other's proposals. (That saves you the job of deciding; you just pick the survivor.)
4. Express your criticisms freely, and withhold praise. (That keeps people on their toes.) Let them know they can be fired or demoted at any time if their research output is only modest.

5. Treat identification of problems such as modest to poor research outputs as signs of failure so as to discourage people from letting you know when something in their area isn't working.
6. Control everything carefully. Ensure people count anything that can be counted, frequently.
7. Make decisions to reorganise or change research policies in secret and spring them on people unexpectedly. (That also keeps them on their toes).
8. Ensure that requests for information about research or information that impacts on research are fully justified, and ensure that its not given out to staff members freely (You don't want data falling into the wrong hands).
9. Assign to lower-level managers, in the name of delegation and participation, responsibility for figuring out how to cut back research capability, lay off researchers, move people about, or otherwise implement threatening decisions you've made. And get them to do it quickly.
10. Above all, never forget that you, the higher-ups, already know everything about research.

Senge's (1990) Organisational Learning Disabilities.

Senge (1990) who is well known in management and organisation studies as a proponent for the "learning organisation" has produced a an insightful chapter concerning organisational learning disabilities. The following is based on Senge's writings, plus that of others' as might be relevant to a research environment.

Senge (1990) provided a list of seven organisational learning disabilities that his research revealed often led to multi-million dollar errors and closure of entire organisations. Like Moss-Kanter (1983) Senge attempted to highlight characteristics of learning organisations by providing examples of their contrast. These learning disabilities have been round a long time and persist.

Senge (1990) states that it is no accident that most organisations learn poorly. The way they are designed and managed, the ways that roles are defined and most importantly, the ways we are taught to think and interact create fundamental learning disabilities. The current author once heard it said that in the Western public school system we "learn how to be taught rather than learn how to learn." What learning does occur, takes place despite these disabilities. What do they look like when we associate them with a research institution?

In summary they are:

I am my position

Lock your identity into a task related role and thereby create a boundary or obstacle for entering other roles, as opposed to viewing your identity through your purpose. Hide in your title, such as "teacher" and avoid the other roles that go with being an active academic staff member. Engage in retrenchment inwards rather than expansion outwards. Make sure you don't look outwards in terms of your purpose. Become a disabled research environment by withdrawal inwards and focussing on tasks and outputs rather than purpose and process.

***The enemy is out there*.**

Make *external attributions* of failure or problem. Lay blame elsewhere for the dull research environment rather than contemplate your own contribution. You can only learn from the latter; the former precludes the opportunity to "learn from your mistakes." Make sure you don't tolerate mistakes, don't learn from them and don't ever consider your own contribution to them. Become a disabled research environment by punishing mistakes and blaming others for them.

The illusion of taking charge.

Confuse "proactivity" in the research environment with "getting things under control." Proactivity actually refers to **active, cognitive exploration and reflection**. To ensure this does not happen, on the one hand be passive instead, or on the other hand reinterpret proactivity as being actively *emotional, aggressive and offensive*. Make sure you are not active, cognitive and inquisitive in addressing the status of the research environment. Become a disabled research environment by remaining passive and/or by being emotional and aggressive.

Focussing on events rather than processes.

Engage in *linear causal event thinking* when contemplating the research environment, as opposed to *cyclical process systems thinking*. Make sure you never use *cyclical process systems thinking*. Become a disabled research environment by focussing entirely on *linear causal event thinking*.

The parable of the boiling frog.

If you place a frog in boiling water it will leap out. However if you place a frog in luke-warm water it will sit in it comfortably. Heat the water and the frog will become more comfortable and drowsy. By the time the water is too hot for the frog to endure it is too drowsy to act and will eventually boil. Metaphorically this means we have a tendency to not notice change unless it is large change. In the academic setting, rush around frantically and thereby prevent yourself from quietly sitting, contemplating, reflecting and noticing slow, gradually changing patterns in the research environment. Research, learning and overcoming problems requires periods of contemplation. On the one hand this might be like having a reading disability or it might be like a defence mechanism. Make sure you do not provide time and space to slow down, contemplate and reflect on small change. Become a disabled research environment by establishing workloads that see everyone rushing about frenetically, or allow staff to retain the mindset of rushing about and *appearing* overly busy so that they have no time to notice what is actually happening about them. Do the same yourself so that you can avoid facing the problem.

The fallacy that we only learn from direct experience.

We only learn from direct experience when the feedback and consequences of that experience are relatively immediate and nearby. When the consequences are distal in both time and space we cannot learn effectively from direct experience. We have short memories. To promote this "memory deficit" we can exacerbate the problems with the research environment by compartmentalising them and dividing them up. As a consequence the big-picture process and pattern inherent in the problem remains unseen with each division (and developing fiefdom) seeing only its specific part. Ensure you don't provide relatively

immediate and handy feedback. Become a disabled research environment by ensuring the consequences of your research actions are too distal in both time and space (you may be employed somewhere else by then and not have to face the music) and exacerbated by dividing the big problem into little chunks which get dished out to small insular groups to handle.

The "teamness" of the "management team" is a myth.

Engage in single loop processes, and practices intended to protect yourself and your fiefdom. Single loop processing occurs when people act habitually and automatically without thinking. Argyris (1982) found from many years of research and running workshops that Executive managers are particularly prone to single loop thinking designed to keep control and which precludes opportunities to learn. Double-loop learning by contrast involves contemplating a situation from several other perspectives as well as one's habitual way of viewing it in order to take a more enriched and beneficial action. Hence prevent feedback about the research environment and opportunity for learning. Ensure you never use double loop learning processes and never network, collaborate with and actually help one another. Become a disabled research environment by applying narrow minded single loop thinking, and practices intended for protecting or saving face.

Memory loss through stroke, trauma, anoxia or decay.

This is an 8th learning disability not mentioned by Senge, but well known to management and organisational researchers. In organisations this loss of memory through "brain damage" occurs from high labour turnover, downsizing, redundancies, staff illnesses (say, as a consequence of stress), where people leave the organisation and take important memories with them, and which are therefore lost from the organisation. If you want to stifle your research environment then ensure this happens and ensure that you cannot attract, develop and retain capable research staff and their memories. Become a disabled research environment by repelling the attentions of capable researchers or by driving capable researchers and their memories away. Also ensure high turnover and brief tenure of key people who have influence on the research environment.

Conclusion

As stated at the commencement of this paper, this is a tongue-in-cheek account for providing environments in which research doesn't work. If this paper describes how to successfully kill your research culture dead, then perhaps the converse provides a recipe for resurrecting it. Although the current author has, in another paper elsewhere, made an attempt to provide that recipe, he invites readers to make their own translations of the constraints and disabilities provided above.

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