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# How managers, academics and students use performance information under conditions of conflicting institutional logics and ambiguity

A case study of a Swedish university

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**Abstract**

A “new public sector” arose during 1980-1990s because of the pressure to utilize public funds more efficiently. The change is commonly known as New Public Management (NPM) and initiated a change towards private sector accounting technology, logics and a series of other management tools. The aim is increased transparency, accountability and performance. The universities are not exempt from the change. The measuring of performance and the use of performance information are ambiguous as universities have an intertwined net of actors with separate interests to accommodate. The actors subscribe to different institutional logics to further complicate the matter. The study explores how managers, academics and students use performance information under conditions of conflicting institutional logics and ambiguity.

The empirics were collected via 12 interviews at Kristianstad University. The respondents included four managers, four academics and four students. The results indicate that performance measurements are used as an indication of performance rather than actual performance. Moreover, the managers subscribe to managerial logic, the academics subscribe to managerial- and academic logic and the students subscribe to service logic. There were only a few signs of ambiguity in the performance measuring and use of performance information. In short, the managers use performance information to evaluate course performance and to allocate resources. The academics use performance information as a means of improving individual and organizational performance. The students use performance information to improve course-quality, prepare for courses and to gauge where they can receive the best educational service possible.

**Keywords**

Public sector, management control systems, university sector, higher education, performance information, institutional logic, ambiguity, decision-making

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# 1. Introduction

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The Swedish university sector is an institution dating back to 1477 (UKÄ, 2017b) and have long been regarded as protectors of knowledge and seekers of truth (Wedlin, 2008). The only institutions with a longer history are the church and monarchy (Townley, 1997). Historically there have been five fundamental changes in the university sector. First, research was included in the mission-statement (19<sup>th</sup> century), second, women were allowed to study at universities (1871), third, the great university reform (1977) centralizing the governance of Higher Education, fourth, the relinquishment of the centralized model (1993) and lastly, the Bologna Process (2007) unifying the standards and goals of Higher Education (henceforth HE) to the “European standard” (Caspersen, Frølich, & Muller, 2017; UKÄ, 2017b; UKÄ, 2017d; UKÄ, 2017e; UKÄ, 2017d). The university sector is Sweden’s largest governmental area of employment engaging around 500 000 people (5% of the population) (Haikola, 2013; UKÄ, 2017a).

Education policy in Sweden is a hot topic and the current Minister of Finance, Magdalena Andersson’s (S)<sup>1</sup> fairly recent political outburst is a prime example (Andersson, 2014). She argued that the (then current) government were robbing people of the opportunity of HE and promised 16 000 additional seats with the objective of reducing unemployment, economic growth and national prosperity. The (then current) Minister of Finance, Anders Borg (M)<sup>2</sup>, were subsequently challenged with the rhetorical question whether he prefers unemployed youth over youth in HE. The disagreement in HE policies affect society as well as the professionals (academics). For example, organizational scholar Mats Alvesson referred to current HE as a “sammelsurium” of programmes in a pretentious package designed to better youth-unemployment figures (Alvesson, 2013). Similarly, the former University Chancellor Anders Flodström and former principal secretary at the National Agency of Higher Education Lena Adamson assert that Jan Björklund (L)<sup>3</sup> has utterly failed with his HE policies (Adamson & Flodström, 2014). They continuously barrage Björklund and proclaim that Sweden have suffered “eight years of frustration due to higher education policies that bear the stamp of ignorance, disdain for knowledge, half-truths and a complete and utter disregard for any opinion other than their own”.

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<sup>1</sup> Social democratic party (left)

<sup>2</sup> Moderate Party (right)

<sup>3</sup> Liberals (right). Former Minister of Education and Science.

A “new public sector” arose during the 1980s and 1990s as a consequence of the pressure to utilize public funds more efficiently (Brignall & Modell, 2000; Christensen, 2011; Northcott & Taulapapa, 2012; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012) and constituted a significant change from the traditional public sector focus of input and budgeting to output/outcome (Modell, 2003; Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Emery, Wyser, Martin & Sanchez, 2008; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Budding, Grossi & Tagesson 2015). The change is commonly known as New Public Management (NPM) and initiated a change in the public sector towards private sector accounting technology, logics and a series of other management tools such as decentralization, privatization and management by objectives with the aim of increasing transparency, accountability and performance (Townley, 1997; Modell, 2003; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Emery et al., 2008; Christensen, 2011; Northcott & Taulapapa, 2012; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Budding et al., 2015).

Universities are part of a nations’ global competitiveness (Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Wedlin, 2008; Chen et al., 2009; Ng & Forbes, 2009) and a well-educated nation has a higher level of democracy and prosperity (Modell, 2005). In the words of Magdalena Andersson (Minister of Finance), HE is a matter of national prosperity (Andersson, 2014). The Swedish university sector’s shift towards a NPM-influenced logic was made evident by the change to performance-based funding initiated by the neo-liberal government in 1991 and launched in 1993 (Modell, 2003; Modell, 2005). However, the change in the funding of HE was frowned upon as it did not conform to the “leftist” tradition in Sweden (Modell, 2005). Therefore, the social democratic government halted the performance based funding in 1994 and instituted a central organization responsible for HE. Thus, in line with the “leftist” tradition (Modell, 2005). Furthermore, students are traditionally considered beneficiaries and not consumers in Sweden (Modell, 2005). However, the leftist idea of governmental-control rather than market-control did not survive as the neo-liberal party restructured the HE system and instituted the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) in 2012/2013 (Pettersen, 2015; UKÄ, 2017g).

UKÄ has the task of quality-ensuring Swedish HE, evaluation of the right to award degrees, evaluate efficiency and responsibility for the HE statistics (UKÄ, 2017h; UKÄ, 2017j). The quality assurance includes financial as well as non-financial measurements (Pettersen, 2015). Universities that provide programmes with the label “very high quality” receives extra funds and the ones labelled “poor-quality” have one year to adapt, adjust and apply for re-evaluation. The university may lose its licence to award degrees if the poor-quality stands (Pettersen, 2015; UKÄ, 2017i). In order to ensure international educational comparability, quality and

transparency the UKÄ are a part of several organizations<sup>4</sup> dedicated to the quality in HE (UKÄ, 2017k). The most recent reform, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), were accepted at the ministry conference in Yerevan in May 2015. (UKÄ, 2015). In sum, quality, efficiency and accountability are accentuated (Pettersen, 2015; UKÄ, 2017h; UKÄ, 2017j) and they are key in the decision on quality and subsequently funding (Modell, 2005; Lewis, Hendel, & Kallsen, 2007; Pettersen, 2015; Caspersen et al., 2017).

## **1.1 Problematization**

There has always been a special aura around universities and the university sector separating them from other public sector organizations (Christensen, 2011; Lewis et al., 2007; cf. Ng & Forbes, 2009; cf. Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014) despite being under the jurisdiction of the government (Townley, 1997; UKÄ, 2017c). However, the Bologna Process and other recent changes have reformed the sector and consequently reduced the level of “academic-freedom” (Lewis et al., 2007; Wedlin, 2008; Melo, Sarrico, & Radnor, 2010; Christensen, 2011; Pop-Vasileva, Baird & Blair, 2011; Frost & Brockman, 2014; Pettersen, 2015; Yang 2016). The latest change materialized on the 1 of January 2017 when the title of University Chancellor officially changed to General Manager and thus ending a 500-year old tradition (UKÄ, 2017l). The change is portrayed as a way of emphasizing that the person in question is the head of a government institution and mainly in charge of supervision, follow-up and quality assurance (Regeringen, 2016). The coercive push from the government on HE policies and the push for the efficient use of resources and accountability through the ending of a notable tradition is arguably an NPM-influenced change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Townley, 1997; Edwards, Ezzamel & Robson, 2005; Wedlin, 2008; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Yang, 2016). The change of titles could be seen as trivial but academics such as Professor Lars Engwall proclaim that “it is unfortunate” and accentuate that the University Chancellor has been the only stable part in the turmoil of political change affecting HE (Engwall, 2016). The academics are not pleased with recent changes as the traditional academic logics where intellectual development of persons through reasoning and learning collide with contemporary notions of NPM such as efficient use of public resources and the conversion of consumers into employees (Townley, 1997; Yamamoto, 2004; Modell,

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<sup>4</sup> ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education,  
ECA - European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education,  
NOQA - Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education,  
INQA/AHE - The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the OECD  
Higher Education Programme IMHE



2005; Wedlin, 2008; Melo et al., 2010; Christensen, 2011; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015).

Universities compete for students through status, reputation and quality of education (Modell, 2005; Wedlin, 2008; Ng & Forbes, 2009; Yang, 2016). Students and parents make value-based judgments of which university to attend and send their child to (Chen, Wang & Yang 2009) because “higher education is a considerable investment. It is therefore unreasonable that the choice of place to study is guided by hearsay, proximity and pure arbitrariness” (Modell, 2005, p. 549). Ng and Forbes (2009) argues that universities must recognize students as prescribers of the institutional logic labelled *service logic* in their marketing efforts. The authors explain that the students effectively reserve themselves the right, as an informed consumer, to point out fault in the service provided by the universities. The notion that students and their parents make somewhat rational decisions based on the information available to maximize their own wealth (i.e. education quality) is sometimes referred to as value-for-money when it comes to the public sector (Brignall & Modell, 2000; Modell, 2005; Wedlin, 2008; Chen et al., 2009). Consequently, universities need a tool to measure performance and communicate the results in the new environment of mass education and conscious consumers (Yamamoto, 2004; Wedlin, 2008; Cheng, 2009; Ng & Forbes, 2009; Melo et al., 2010; Christensen, 2011; Westergaard, 2014). However, the internal and external actors’ complex intertwined interests mean that evaluating performance in the university sector is problematic (Townley, 1997; Brignall & Modell, 2000; Edwards, et al., 2005; Modell, 2005; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; cf. Emery et al., 2008; Cheng, 2009; cf. Ng & Forbes, 2009; Dormer & Gill, 2010; Christensen, 2011; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Westergaard, 2014; Pettersen, 2015; Yang, 2016).

The current method of evaluating quality and resource efficiency is stated by UKÄ to be partly based on a peer-review system where peers evaluate and present their opinion to UKÄ that subsequently decides the outcome (UKÄ, 2016a; UKÄ, 2017m). However, Pettersen (2015) presents information that suggests that the statement of UKÄ is a half-truth. NPM-technology is naturally flawed and unequipped to measure performance in the university sector (Christensen, 2011) because financial performance is not necessarily relevant (cf. Edwards et al., 2005) and non-financial measurements such as quality are difficult to measure. Quality is an ambiguous term that shifts depending on institutional logic (Modell, 2003; Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003; Modell, 2005; Lewis et al., 2007; Ng & Forbes, 2009; Melo et al., 2010; cf. ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Pettersen, 2015) and the decision whether a university programme is of poor

quality or high quality is delegated to a group of peers (UKÄ, 2016a; UKÄ, 2017m). They are supposedly unbiased but nevertheless part of an institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Townley, 1997; Cheng, 2009). The university sector has traditionally been evaluated using collegiate governing practices (Cheng, 2009; Melo et al., 2010; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Pettersen, 2015) and the academics still uphold academic logic advocating academic freedom, where the academics are “trusted to manage the pattern of one’s working life and priorities” (Henkel, 2005 in Kallio, Kallio, Tienari & Hyvönen, 2015, p. 18), as a must for an acceptable level of quality (Christensen, 2011).

Performance will be measured differently and information used differently depending on institutional logic (Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003; Modell, 2005; Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Cheng, 2009; Melo et al., 2010; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Pettersen, 2015; Järvenpää & Länsiluoto, 2016; Reay & Jones, 2016; Yang, 2016). Cloutier and Langley (2013) and Caspersen et al. (2017) expands and explain that competing institutional logics and the lack of a dominant logic results in ambiguous goals and practices which, per Su Jung (2014), negatively influence performance and per ter Bogt and Scapens (2012) negatively influence creativity. Irrespectively, direct goals are politically sensitive and vague goals create ambiguity (Modell, 2003) that subsequently creates an environment within the organization where academics chase short-term goal achievement over long-term academic progress (ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). Reay and Hinings (2009) and Pettersen (2015) convincingly state that it is possible for two or more logics to be dominant within an organization at the same time given that there is a common goal (e.g. producing performance information) or a jointly desired outcome (e.g. high-quality education).

Pop-Vasileva et al. (2011) and Kallio et al. (2015) provide evidence suggesting that different faculties within the same university, belonging to the same profession (academic), experience the environment and NPM-technology in different ways suggesting that there can be several versions of academic logics and managerial logics simultaneously within an organization. The same reasoning ought to be applicable for the students as subscribers of service logic (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Nonetheless, Yang (2016) highlights that ambiguity is not necessarily negative because it represents room for managerial interpretation which means that goals and practices can be set and implemented to suit several actors with conflicting interests.

Actors within universities have a common goal of presenting performance information to external users of information regardless of preferred institutional logic (cf. Ng & Forbes, 2009).

So, who are the users? External users of information are the funding body (i.e. government) professional agencies (e.g. student union) and the consumer (i.e. students) (Modell, 2000). Students are arguable a difficult group to classify as they are both internal and external actors and users of performance information. Nevertheless, for this study focus is directed towards the internal users of performance information. The students as primary consumers of the produced service (Modell, 2005), academics who effectively teach, administrate and conduct research within the organisation (Christensen, 2011; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015) and the managers who, in the spirit of NPM ought to utilize the performance information as an organizational management-tool (Moynihan & Ingraham, 2004; Lewis et al., 2007; Melo et al., 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Westergaard, 2014; Pettersen, 2015) ought to be the internal users.

The performance information produced in the university sector is often used to legitimize rather than maximize (Brignall & Modell, 2000). Modell and Wiesel (2008) and Cheng (2009) similarly state that the tools and information can be purely symbolic in institutional environments because of conflicting institutional logics and the consequent lack of a clear objective. Vakkuri and Meklin (2003), Thornton and Ocasio (2008), Dormer and Gill (2010), Melo et al. (2010) Rautiainen and Järvenpää (2012), Boitier and Rivière (2013) and Pettersen (2015) concurs. In other words, the goal of the measurements is ambiguous and therefore the use of the information is ambiguous (Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003). The term *use* is viewed in the light of “use value” which implies that the use of information is valued differently by different users. Thus, action will vary since different information is used differently based on the “use value” to the user who utilizes the information to choose whether to act or not to act. For example, in a university context the “use value” of performance information for a user subscribing to a managerial logic could be the ability to use the information in order to compare performance to competitors (Kallio et al. 2015). The same could arguably be the case for a student subscribing to a service logic as the conscious consumers wants the highest quality service available (Ng & Forbes, 2009). So, why measure performance if the tools and use are ambiguous? Reay and Hinings (2009) explain “institutional logics are the organizing principles that shape the behaviour of field participants. Because they refer to a set of belief systems and associated practices, they define the content and meaning of institutions. Thus institutional logics provide a link between institutions and action” (p. 631). This suggests that the performance information, albeit ambiguous, can be used as a base for action and that the use of information can vary depending on institutional logic.

The intermediary actor in the production of performance information is the academics as they must adhere to both the students they teach and the management they report to (Pettersen, 2015). The academics can be assumed to subscribe to an academic logic accentuating the need for academic freedom whilst the managers subscribe to a managerial logic minded towards “governance by numbers” to ensure quality. Furthermore, the students and the service logic is caught in the middle as students ought to side with the institutional logic that ensures the highest level of quality in the provided services (Ng & Forbes, 2009). According to Cheng (2009), Christensen (2011), Frost and Brockmann (2014) and Pettersen (2015) the managerial logic is victorious in the clash. Accordingly, the level of academic freedom is reduced. Hence, the prerequisite for quality is compromised per the academics with gamesmanship as a consequence (Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003; Yamamoto, 2004; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Lewis et al., 2007; Melo et al., 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015). Frost and Brockmann (2014) refer to the gamesmanship as “intellectual prostitution” and ter Bogt and Scapens (2012) label it embellishment of performance. However, it is not seen as perverse per ter Bogt and Scapens (2012) but rather seen as a rational response to the measurement of quality through numbers. The quantification of qualitative measurements such as quality in the ambiguous university environment are evidently accompanied by complications. The use of the produced performance information is likewise problematic and uncertain (Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003) since institutional logics compete and co-exist in an ambiguous environment affecting managers, academics and students choice of action. Consequently, the questions how managers, academics and students use performance information arises.

This study can be seen as a first step towards the exploration, mapping and subsequent empirical testing of the internal actors’ use of performance information. The practical implications are that the university, who have some degree of autonomy, can guide the information to its user more efficiently. If the mapping and subsequent empirical testing proves successful, the theoretical framework may be considered sound and consequently used as a conceptual framework in future studies explaining actors use of performance information in an institutional ambiguous context.

## **1.2 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore how managers, academics and students use performance information.

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## 2. Theoretical method

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“Characterizing the nature of the link between theory and research is by no means a straightforward matter. There are several issues at stake here, but two stand out in particular. First, there is the questions of what form of theory one is talking about. Secondly, there is the matter of whether data are collected to test or to build theories” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 7). The matters are discussed in this chapter with the addition of the chosen research method.

### 2.1 Research approach

The construction of a theoretical framework that argues for the creation of a conceptual world based in conditions of ambiguity and conflicting institutional logics ought to suggest deduction (Thurén, 2007; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013). However, a pure deductive approach would complicate the study since the research purpose implies a qualitative method and thus, exposing the data to subjective interpretation (Alvehus, 2013). Neither would a purely inductive approach be appropriate as it is practically impossible to locate a starting point without a theoretical understanding (Alvehus, 2013). Thus, a combination of a deductive and inductive approach ought to be suitable as the purpose of the study is to explore *how* managers, academics and student use performance information. In other words, the purpose implies an abductive approach because the theoretical framework and the area of enquiry (see section 3.7 Model) emerged out of previous research but intends to explore rather than explain (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013).

### 2.2 Research method

The noun *how* stated in the study’s purpose ought to mean that a qualitative method is preferable (Alvehus, 2013). Qualitative research methods are best suited for research intended to explore since quantitative research aspire to explain causal relationships between variables (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013). The distinction between the two methods are vague and the use of the distinction is somewhat debated (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Nevertheless, this study is labelled qualitative in accordance with Bryman and Bell (2011) who state that qualitative research encompasses the creation of theory rather than testing (i.e. “how” and not “how often”) and the emphasis on individuals’ interpretation and creation of an ever-changing social reality. Thus, conforming with the study’s purpose.

Yin (2014) refers to Schramm (1971) when explaining that case studies are warranted when exploring decisions. In other words, the connection to explore, “how” and decision is obvious and thus, the purpose of the study warrants a case study format. Yin (2014) points out that a

case study does not have to be of a qualitative nature. It can be qualitative, quantitative and in some cases, utilize mixed methods. It all depends on the research question and context (Yin, 2014). The format does however imply that the data cannot be statistically generalized to a larger population (Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). Fortunately, this is not an issue as the case study format is conducted in a descriptive manner (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2014).

Case studies are one of the most difficult research methods to utilize and evaluate because the researcher must clearly state the investigated “case” and the researcher’s capability to successfully conduct the study is always open for questioning (Scapens, 2004; Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). Bryman and Bell (2011) explain that a case often refers to a geographical location or organization. However, Alvehus (2013) and Yin (2014) state that a case is the definition of the unit of analysis (e.g. study of ethnic diversity in a neighbourhood) rather than the geographical area (e.g. study of the neighbourhood). In other words, it is impossible to study all aspects of the neighbourhood based on a pre-constructed theoretical framework but a unit, a niche or specific theoretical piece of the puzzle is possible and the researcher should strive to define this unit in an unambiguous manner (Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). However, Scapens (2004) upholds the notion that the population is not of utmost importance but the coherence between the chosen case, population and research question is of paramount importance. In this study the case is defined as the use of performance information at Kristianstad University, and the subunits (i.e. the internal actors) that ultimately use the information are managers, academics and students. Thus, coherent with the purpose of the study. Yin (2014) explains that subunits imply an embedded single-case study design because the units of interest are present in the defined context of the case. The risk of over-emphasising the role of the subunit is not to be underestimated as this would result in either a multiple case study (e.g. comparing subunits) or a holistic design exploring a single level of enquiry (i.e. only one unit in the case) (Yin, 2014). The focal of the study is the use of performance information and not the users themselves. They are included as users of information and not because the individuals are invariably interesting (Alvesson, 2011). In summary, this study can be classified as an abductive, qualitative embedded single-case study.

### **2.3 Theories**

The theories chosen for the study are institutional theory and the supplementary concept of institutional logics. Furthermore, ambiguity theory is also included. The theories constitute the lens and the language of which the information is filtrated through (Alvehus, 2013). In other words, the theoretical framework is used to describe the settings, assumptions and key terms of

the study and can therefore be used as a map of the constructed conceptual world (Alvehus, 2013).

The theoretical framework is based on peer-reviewed research articles across disciplines such as accounting, management, public management, sociology, decision-making and organizational research. Thus, avoiding the confinement of a single theory or paradigm. In other words, allowing the research to portrait the complex organizational environment through a broader lens and perspectives. Hence, the empirical data is not forced into relation with a specific theory but rather related to a broad spectrum of ideas (Hoque, Covaleski & Gooneratne, 2013). The focus has not been directed towards finding “new” research but rather on finding a wide array of angles, adjacent topics and corresponding research from several fields. Thus, not prioritizing the publication date. Consequently, both old and new articles are included in the framework. The older articles were generally found through the newer articles reference lists. The practice could potentially constitute a large part of the area of enquiry un-explored but on the other hand, the framework can be seen a coherent and valid based on the wide range of peer-reviewed articles focus on the same or similar topic. In addition, official documents from Kristianstad University (henceforth HKR) are included. The documents were collected through the official webpage and includes news articles and annual reports. The information was used to establish the context of HKR and to provide insights to whom to interview. Moreover, the newspaper articles in the introduction and problematization (see chapter 1) were included because of the authors’ authority and not on the basis of a “good” newspaper. Thus, more focus on substance than forum.

The peer-reviewed articles were collected from the database HKR SUMMON and Google Scholar. The utilized search words were: public sector, universities, academics, higher education, institutional theory, institutional logic, ambiguity, choice theory, decision, decision-making, management control systems, performance measurements, performance indicators and performance information. The search function of truncation (\*) was utilized in order to enable different inflections.

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## 3. Literature review

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A theoretical framework is needed in order to enable the study's purpose and ultimately justify the conclusions drawn. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part covers the performance measurements in the Swedish context as well as Kristianstad University to enable the reader to comprehend the settings of the study. The second part covers the chosen theories. The study is based on institutional theory and the concept termed institutional logics. Ambiguity as a concept is also included.

### 3.1 Institutionalialia – the Swedish context

Performance measurement of HE are delegated to UKÄ by the government through an annual letter of appropriation describing goals and funding (UKÄ, 2017g). Additionally, the government sends continuous orders throughout the year (UKÄ, 2017g). However, the previous system of quality assurance has been an utter failure with a small or no connection to actual quality per Pettersen (2015). Nevertheless, UKÄ presented a new system of quality assurance, based in the Bologna Process, in the report: National system for quality assurance of higher education (2015) bound for action 2017-2022. The new system of quality assurance was first tested in the autumn of 2016 and encompasses four components, appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers, institutional reviews of the universities' quality assurance process, programme evaluations and thematic evaluations (UKÄ, 2016a). The quality assurance is a collaboration between UKÄ, university representatives, teachers, students, employers and the labour market (UKÄ, 2016a). UKÄ referred to this as a peer-review system and uphold the notion of "a legally correct, predictable and transparent quality assurance process" (UKÄ, 2016a, p. 25). The four components are described below.

Appraisal of applications for degree-awarding powers are measured through interviews with representatives of the programme and features questions such as: are students provided the necessary conditions and thus enabled to fulfil the requirements for a degree and how does this university continuously work towards improvement (UKÄ, 2016a). In some cases, students or doctoral students are interviewed by the peer-review group (UKÄ, 2016a). In sum, the expected learning outcomes and the ability to obtain the outcomes are evaluated. Thus, the connection to the Bologna Process's prescribed evaluation through learning outcomes is evident (Pettersen, 2015; Caspersen et al., 2017).

Institutional reviews of the universities quality assurance processes are essentially an external evaluation of internal-control. The university presents a self-evaluation to the peer-review



group that subsequently visits the university and conduct interviews with students, representatives and doctoral students (UKÄ, 2016a). In addition, labour market representatives (of corporations collaborating with universities) will perchance be interviewed (UKÄ, 2016a). Questions such as: Do you have a quality assurance policy and how does it work are enquired. In other words, it is an evaluation of the process of improvement (UKÄ, 2016a). The objective is to “give the HEIs<sup>5</sup> the opportunity to demonstrate that their quality assurance processes ensure and enhance the quality of the courses and programmes” (UKÄ, 2016a, p. 31). The internal control is either approved or under review (i.e. fails) (UKÄ, 2016a).

Programme evaluations measure conditions and outcomes on a programme level. Questions such as: Is the programme compliant with the current laws and frameworks and how does the programme ensure that the students are enabled to meet the requirements for graduation (UKÄ, 2016a) are enquired. The evaluation comprises of interviews, a self-evaluation and the assessment of individual, randomly selected, degree projects (UKÄ, 2016a). The connection to the NPM setting of accountability and transparency are evident and so are the Bologna Process’s learning outcomes (Townley, 1997; Modell, 2003; Christensen, 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015; Caspersen et al., 2017). Third-cycle programmes will not be asses based on degree projects because the public defence system based in Swedish law is deemed proper (UKÄ, 2016a).

Thematic evaluations are based on individual cases and themes chosen to evaluate. Thus, no clear method is described (UKÄ, 2016a). “The purpose of thematic evaluations is to provide a better understanding and national comparisons of how various higher education institutions (HEIs) work and of achieved results in the examined theme.” (UKÄ, 2016a, p. 38). In other words, it is an evaluation of the norm.

### **3.1.2 Kristianstad University**

Kristianstad University completed a reform in 2008 with the objective of cost-effectiveness and a unified university (HKR, 2014). The reform is said to have contributed to stronger finances (HKR, 2014). In addition, a balances score card (BSC) is mentioned in the annual reports of 2013 and 2014. Thus, evidently influenced by the NPM-era (Townley, 1997; Modell, 2003; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Emery et al., 2008; Vakkuri, 2010; Christensen, 2011; Northcott & Taulapapa, 2012; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> Abbreviation for higher education institution

HKR are aware of the difficulty of measuring quality in education but nevertheless mention the achievement of expected learning outcomes required for the degree and the employability of students after a completed degree as good proxies (HKR, 2016). The learning outcomes are a clear connection to the Bologna Process (Pettersen, 2015; Caspersen et al., 2017) and the employability is arguable both an output and an outcome because student contributes to society (outcome) through getting a job (outcome) (Wedlin, 2008; Melo et al., 2010). The quality assurance work is both formal and informal and must be done on a daily basis (HKR, 2016). Moreover, the connection between the programmes and the labour market is said to be a “prioritized area at HKR” (HKR, 2017a, p. 10) and thus, constituting a link to society. Furthermore, students are claimed to be important contributors in the new quality assurance system implemented by UKÄ (see section 3.1 Institutionalisation – the Swedish context) (UKÄ, 2017).

Academics are evaluated partly by teaching skills through EvaSys, a survey technology used to evaluate courses. The system has been in place since the reform of 2008 (HKR, 2014; HKR, 2015; HKR, 2016). Students are granted access to the standardized questionnaire through e-mail. The course responsible academic has the option of adding their own questions. Due to criticism from students claiming that the questionnaire was too long a new standardized questionnaire with fewer questions was developed and implemented in 2014. The intention was to increase the response rate. Student satisfaction for the year of 2016 is, according to vice-chancellor, four out of a five-point scale measured through the course evaluations (HKR, 2017a). Furthermore, academic teaching skills are also evaluated through a non-compulsory pedagogical accreditation. The academic must apply for the promotion through an evaluation process initiated in 2012 (HKR, 2016b). The career ladder includes two steps, “accomplished” and “excellent” (HKR, 2016b). The promotion system provides the academics without a strong research base a title and the accompanied prestige. Furthermore, the title of “accomplished” is equivalent to a Licentiate degree and the title “excellent” is equivalent to Associate professor in term of salary increase (HKR, 2016b). The objective is to premier academics that demonstrates pedagogical skills and a sense of responsibility towards the development of pedagogical skills (HKR, 2016b). The academic’s application is evaluated by an advisory committee that consists of the Prorector and two representatives, nominated by the head of the departments, from each School. The committee screens the application and, if approved, sent to another committee consisting of two experts that evaluates the pedagogical skills and decides whether the academic is promoted or not (HKR, 2016b). The evaluation is based in Swedish

law and local practice (HKR, 2016b). Once evaluated and promoted the academic is expected to support other academics that want to apply for the titles (HKR, 2016b).

The second part of the academic evaluation regards research and publication of articles. HKR state that publications in highly regarded international journals are considered an important performance measurement. It is said to be valued partly due to the increased external funding it attracts and that high-quality research means that the academics and thus the institution is not falling behind in the academic community (HKR, 2014). Moreover, the number of citations are utilized as an indicator of academic quality (HKR, 2017a). HKR accentuated that the number of produced articles and the number of citations is not the definite mark of what constitutes high-quality research as research is a long-term investment (HKR, 2017a). Thus, possibly counteracting the academic short-sightedness produced by direct output goals (see section 3.6 Implications of performance measurements in universities).

The research must connect to the first-cycle education (university diplomas and Bachelors' degree) in a clear fashion, have an impact outside of the academic community and influence society (HKR, 2015; HKR, 2016a; HKR, 2017a). Thus, showing anecdotal evidence that research is guided and not up the individual academic due to the demand to produce useful research. Christensen (2011) state that practice is representative of NPM. The connection to the first cycle education is named "our golden rule" (HKR, 2016a, p. 3). Moreover, academics that show promise and strength in their field of research are premiered through a performance-based allocation system developed in the fiscal year of 2014 and implemented at the year-end of 2015 (HKR, 2017a). In practice the system means that academics are allocated 3 months of research time (half of time given to the professors pre performance-based allocation system) in order to benefit research active academics. In other words, priorities must be made with limited resources and thus showing anecdotal evidence for an NPM-influenced internal competition for resources (Frost & Brockmann, 2014). In addition, the academics can now apply for an internal research grant (HKR, 2017a). The research board is responsible for the evaluation and the application is approved or rejected based on quality, achievability and relevance (HKR, 2016c). Quality is measured through lucidity in argumentation, a clear purpose, proper choice of method, transparent implementation and ethical considerations (HKR, 2016c). However, the system is considered ineffective and costly (HKR, 2017a). The managers is aware of the problem and the model is under development and will be improved. The timeframe is not specified (HKR, 2017a).

### **3.2 Institutional theory**

Organizations in a given field exposed to similar circumstances tend to resemble one another and the reason is a gradual bureaucratization homogenizing fields through isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The isomorphism consequently legitimizes organizations operations and thus its existence (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The bureaucratization and resemblance constitutes institutions and subsequently institutional pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional pressure can be explained as “organizations in a structured field respond to an environment that consists of other organizations responding to their environment, which consists of organizations responding to an environment of organizations’ responses” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 149). The pressure consists of laws, rules and social norms within the specific set of circumstances on a national-, industry-, organizational- and individual level resulting in competition for resources and clients as well as political power and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Although difficult to separate in practice there are three types of isomorphism: coercive, mimetic and normative (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Coercive isomorphism constitutes pressure through formal and informal demands from people or organizations with power and leverage (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For example, the legislation effecting universities are coercive as they are fixed (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, the coercive isomorphism must not be in the form of imperative laws. The student union that initiated the re-evaluate the great university reform of 1977 and the government that halted the performance-based funding though formal power (Modell, 2005) are also prime examples of coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Mimetic isomorphism signifies the copying of structure, operations, strategy or culture with the intent to appear legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, organizations mimic other organizations deemed legitimate in response to organizational uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For example, a university ought to mimic well-known and legitimate universities in term of structure, strategy and operations to be seen as reputable and legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Normative isomorphism implies the pressure of a profession trying to explore and institute methods of work and thus, pressure to implement best-practice (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Personnel turnover constitutes a cornerstone in normative isomorphism because recruited personnel often have similar backgrounds, education, social status and thus, similar ways of solving problems. For example, itinerant professors spreading the norm through the transfer of knowledge and problem-solving methods developed at previous universities. Furthermore, the

university accreditation system can also be seen as normative because of the peer-review system (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In other words, expert groups that conduct the peer-review produce the norm of satisfying performance required to be promoted and the promoted academic subsequently enhances and reproduce the norm when and if he/she receives the promotion.

The university sector can be seen as an institutional environment partly due to the fact that a student union instigated the great reform of 1977 and partly because the supervising and quality assuring role of UKÄ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Furthermore, the European Union's (EU) supranational status constitutes almighty laws that trump Swedish laws in case of conflicting laws (The Swedish Parliament, 2011). In other words, laws, rules and social norms are used to govern and drive change in the university sector. For example, the initiative of performance-based funding was launched by the government that coerced through the change but the social norms were off-set and thus not considered legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Modell, 2003; Modell, 2005). Consequently, the succeeding government coerced the sector into legitimate practices (Modell, 2003; Modell, 2005). Clearly, institutional pressure through coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphism is present in the Swedish university sector (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and thus relevant to be considered in the study. However, to view behaviour as a mechanical irrational response to institutional pressure and the pursuit of legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) is a rather crude way of analysing organizational behaviour because the actors within the organization effectively construct and define their environment (Townley, 1997; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016). Thus, one must consider the logic behind their behaviours and the role of institutional actors to promote change. The off-step from isomorphism and the irrational adoption of behaviours towards a rational behaviour where actors consciously shape the environment is termed institutional logic (Townley, 1997; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016).

### **3.3 Institutional logic**

The concept of institutional logic provides a structured way of understanding individual and organizational behaviours despite seemingly irrational and contradictory behaviours intended to legitimize the organization (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016). Alford and Friedland (1985) introduced institutional logics in a seminal piece where the authors explained the struggle within organizations that consequently shape organizations (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016). The term institutional

logic is defined by Jackall (1988) in Thornton and Ocasio (2008) as “the complicated, experientially constructed, and thereby contingent set of rules, premiums and sanctions that men and women in particular contexts create and recreate in such a way that their behavior and accompanying perspective are to some extent regularized and predictable. Put succinctly, an institutional logic is the way a particular social world works.” (p. 101). Thornton and Ocasio (1999) refined the definition and the authors state that institutional logics are “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 101). In other words, humans define organizations through institutional logics (Cloutier & Langley, 2013) that effectively creates, reward and thus recreates wanted behaviours (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016).

Thornton and Ocasio (2008) explain that the social environment within the institution consequently affects the organizational behaviour similarly to the conforming of behaviour by isomorphism. However, institutional logics provide the actors with legitimacy through appropriateness rather than through the resemblance of other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; March & Olsen, 1989 in Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). In other words, appropriate in the social context provided by the dominant institutional logic (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016). Important to note is that different institutional logics can be promoted by actors with the ability to influence the beliefs system of their fellow actors (Reay & Hinings, 2009; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016),

It is important to separate a change in actions and a change in institutional logics as actions are influenced by the institutional logics but institutional logics are not necessarily influenced by actions (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Actions that is not influenced by the institutional logic are termed as loosely coupled (Townley, 1997; Modell, 2003; Modell, 2005) or de-coupled (Brignall & Modell, 2000; Modell & Wiesel, 2008; Dormer & Gill, 2010; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016). In the context of the university sector, loose coupling can be exemplified by the symbolical use of performance information due to conflicting institutional logics. Managers ought to utilize the extensive performance measurements systems in decisions-making but it is often the academics that oversee the measuring meaning that the managers receive information the academic consider important

based on his/hers institutional logic (cf. Brignall & Modell, 2000; Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; cf. Dormer & Gill, 2010; Melo et al., 2010; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Pettersen, 2015). In other words, the managers receive the “wrong” information for the intended purpose with the result that it is left unused. Brignall and Modell (2000) and Modell (2003) state that de-coupling is more likely to occur in institutional environments with conflicting institutional logics. Thus, the use (action) of performance information is influenced by the prevailing institutional logic ((Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Länsiluoto, 2016; Yang, 2016). The term *use* is connected to the term “use value” explained by Kallio et al. (2015) which implies that the use of information is valued differently by different users. Consequently, information can be used as a base for a variety of different actions despite a seemingly “obvious action”. Thus, the interpretation and following action will be contingent on the institutional logic that the user conforms to.

The competing institutional logics shape actors within the organization and the actors must choose which institutional logic to prescribe to (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Länsiluoto, 2016). A hybrid logic is a possibility where actors prescribe to several logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012) but then again, the combination of logics termed hybrid is arguable just another logic containing elements of previously dominant logics (Reay & Hinings, 2009). Nevertheless, two dominant institutional logics can co-exist simultaneously (Townley, 1997; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Pettersen, 2015; Järvenpää & Länsiluoto, 2016) and the evidence is found in Reay and Hinings (2009) description of the Canadian health sector where two institutional logics coined medical professionalism and business-like health care competed yet co-existed. The doctors subscribed to the professional logic advocating patient well-being regardless of cost and the state to the managerial logic advocating cost-effective healthcare. The study proves important not because the findings of two logics co-existing but rather that the institutional logics can co-exist if the actors have a common goal even though the logics lack coherence in methods and approach to the goal completion. The common goal in Reay and Hinings (2009) were the delivery of health services. The connection between the university sector and Reay and Hinings (2009) is evident if you imagine the medical staff representing the academics and the managers representing the state. The academics subscribing to the academic logic are more concern with the development of individuals through learning (Townley, 1997)

while managers subscribing to the managerial logic is more concern with cost-effective learning and the production of workers (Kallio et al., 2015). Similarly to Reay and Hinings (2009), ter Bogt and Scapens (2012) and Agyemang and Broadbent (2015) show evidence for an acceptance of the managerial logic from the academics in certain situations. Hence, the managerial logic influenced by NPM and the academic logic based in traditional academic values (Townley, 1997; Melo et al., 2010; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015) ought to be able to co-exist similarly to the medical staff and state in Reay and Hinings (2009) given that there is a common goal or a jointly desired outcome (Pettersen, 2015).

The conflict or co-existence of multiple institutional logics and the changed academic work in the NPM-era have anchored the academics as public servants delivering a service rather than a highly respected professional group free of public scrutiny with a high level of freedom (Townley, 1997; Yamamoto, 2004; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; cf. Modell & Wiesel, 2008; Melo et al., 2010; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Kallio et al., 2015). The universities are now in the business of knowledge production (Ng & Forbes, 2009; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; cf. Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Kallio et al., 2015; Pettersen, 2015). The old image of academics in their ivory towers (Wedlin, 2008; Ng & Forbes, 2009) are long gone as academics and students must co-operate in the creation of value (knowledge) (Ng & Forbes, 2009). This means that the students have leverage and thus power (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Consequently, students can demand a high-quality service (education) from the universities. Students who feel that the delivered service are inadequate in relation to the expected level of service disengage and focuses on surface learning and complaining rather than developing a critical mind and the actual learning experience (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Ng and Forbes (2009) explain that the “perceived value has been difficult to define” (p. 45) as the student are unable to judge whether the education is of high or poor quality. They will not recognize the fact until they are out on the job testing their skills and knowledge. As a matter of fact, the authors claim that the student-academic interaction is more important than the educational substance. The outlined approach to interaction and decisions by students in the university sector is termed *service logic* (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Nonetheless, the common goal of both the academic- and managerial logic subscribers ought to be the delivery of HE to the subscribers of service logic (Ng & Forbes, 2009) but the technologies accompanying the performance measuring systems are ambiguous



(Modell, 2003; Vakkuri, 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Su Jung, 2014; Caspersen et al., 2017).

### **3.4 Ambiguity in the use of performance information**

The era of NPM have introduces new technologies with the objective to aid the rationality of organizations and thus increase efficiency and decrease ambiguity in the public sector (Vakkuri, 2010). However, the tools are naturally flawed and fail to connect to reality and consequently display an organizations actual performance (Vakkuri, 2010). Furthermore, users are stuck in-between different opinions and objectives that shape the public sector (March, 1978; Vakkuri, 2010) with the consequence that the tools are interpreted based on the actor's institutional logic rather than an unambiguous objective (Vakkuri, 2010). Thus, the tools are not objective but rather used as mechanisms of power and influence (Vakkuri, 2010). The term use is referred to how managers actually use the tool and the information in "recurrent, contextual and situated practise" (Vakkuri, 2010, p. 1002). Kallio et al. (2015) adds to the conversation and explain that the NPM-tools are used to quantitatively evaluate past performance when subscribing to a managerial logic. The approach differs from the academic logic where performance measurements tools are used to improve future performance because of the personal growth associated with research projects (Kallio et al., 2015). The service logic stands somewhere in the middle because the subscribers per Ng and Forbes (2009) are student who are unable to properly evaluate the substance of the provided service and thus the future value. Yet, subscribers of service logic acts as conscious consumers in the hunt for the best service and thus evaluating past performance as it is all they know. In other words, the tools fail to connect performance measurements to a specific action because of the ambiguity in the public sector, the tool and how to use it (Vakkuri, 2010; Kallio et al., 2015).

The term ambiguity is not easily defined according to Etner, Jeleva and Tallon (2012) who explains that "it is difficult to come up with a definition of what it means for an act to be ambiguous or unambiguous, or what it means for an act to be more ambiguous than another act. As a matter of fact, the very definition of an ambiguous event and thus generally "ambiguity" is not that straightforward" (p. 253). The authors continue and explain that uncertainty of probable futures can be seen as ambiguity but should not be confused with risk. Risk is a value added to a probable future event but ambiguity suggests that nothing is known about the future. March (1978) elaborates and state that ambiguous conditions means that goals are vague, problematic, inconsistent and unstable. Caspersen et al. (2017) adds to the conversation and argues for the term to be utilized as a synonym for "openness to different interpretations".

However, problems in terms of ambiguity often arise from the disagreement in the clarification and coherence of goals between individuals (March, 1978).

Humans basically guess twice when choosing an action (March, 1978). We guess once about the future consequences and we subsequently guess how we feel about the consequences (preference) (March, 1978). The standard operating procedure in decision-making is the drawing of a decision-tree and consequently mapping and assessing probabilities of different consequences and the value we attach to the consequence (e.g. wanted or unwanted) in order to overview the consequences and preferences (March, 1978; Borgonovo & Marinacci, 2015). In other words, decision under circumstances of ambiguity ultimately means that the guesses are useless because we cannot foresee any consequences and thus have no preference (March, 1978). Therefore, normative theories of choice fail to predict behaviour (March, 1978) and thus rational choices as they are unable to factor in ambiguity. Nevertheless, theories of choice are not useless as descriptive theories are able to record and evaluate sensible choices (March, 1978).

Humans shape and reshape environments by exposing themselves to values, beliefs and social norms within the social context and we consequently use tools in an “appropriate” manner in regards to the environment and the established institutional logics (March, 1978; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Vakkuri, 2010; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Järvenpää & Lämsiluoto, 2016). March (1978) refers to Simon (1955; 1956) who state that “constraints” are conditions that makes irrational behaviours and actions sensible because they effectively decide the meaning of “appropriate”. The constraints can be technical and human (capacity) on an individual level as well as organizational level (March, 1978). The resemblance to the properties of institutional logics is unmistakable as the pair enables, restricts and reward behaviours. The academic logic’s resistance to the managerial logic through the insistence of academic freedom (Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011) can arguably be seen as the academics establishing, consciously or unconsciously, individual and organizational constraints in order to decide what is deemed appropriate by the standard of their logic. The constraints can be different depending on academic faculty or department in the same university (Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; Kallio et al., 2015). In other words, seemingly irrational actions can be sensible and therefore somewhat rational given the individual and organizational constraints (March, 1978).

The academics can be assumed to take sensible action under the conditions of ambiguity in the university sector as academics know the desired outcome and the measured outputs (see section

3.5 Performance measurements in universities). However, the use of performance measurements tools is ambiguous with the consequence that academics base decisions on what they know, namely output measurements (ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). The extensive focus on output results in perverse irrational behaviours (see section 3.6 Implications of performance measurements in universities) but can nevertheless be seen as sensible choices based on institutional logic (March, 1978; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). Etner et al. (2012) refers to the ambiguity as choice under complete ignorance signifying the indifferent approach to the tools. Moreover, Vakkuri and Meklin (2003), Modell and Wiesel (2008) and Cheng (2009) claim that the produced information is used symbolically. Therefore, fuelling the ambiguity surrounding performance measurement tools with distorted behaviour as a possible result (see section 3.6 Implications of performance measurements in universities) (March, 1978; Vakkuri, 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). However, ambiguity is not exclusively negative (March, 1978; Vakkuri, 2010; Yang, 2016). The diverging interests of managers, academics and students can mean that ambiguity is a blessing in disguise because it allows for discretion and interpretation (March, 1978; Vakkuri, 2010; Yang, 2016). In other words, ambiguity can create perverse behaviour but it can also represent the mediating factor that allows conflicting institutional logics to co-exist. The vague and inconsistent goals provide the users with leeway to interpret the information based on institutional logic while simultaneously driving towards a common goal.

### **3.5 Performance measurements in universities**

Performance is measured in order to communicate information to users whom can utilize the information as a base for decisions (Lewis et al., 2007; Westergaard, 2014; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015). It involves three steps; measuring, reporting and action (Melo et al., 2010). The third step is the most important step as the two previous steps are useless without consequent action (Melo et al., 2010). In other words, the use of performance information dictates whether the performance measurement is useful. Moreover, there are several issues when measuring performance in the university sector because of the various actors (i.e. users of information) in all levels of society (Townley, 1997; Brignall & Modell, 2000; Edwards, et al., 2005; Modell, 2005; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; cf. Emery et al., 2008; Cheng, 2009; Dormer & Gill, 2010; Christensen, 2011; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Westergaard, 2014; Pettersen, 2015; Yang, 2016).

The interests and institutional logics of the actors are simply too diverse (Townley, 1997; Yamamoto, 2004; Modell, 2005; Wedlin, 2008; Melo et al., 2010; Christensen, 2011; Pop-

Vasileva et al., 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015) to be divided into the aggregated term internal and external actors. The actors must be divided into subgroups. Brignall & Modell (2000) argue that there are three stakeholder groups (actors) in the public sector, the funding body, professional agencies and the consumer. In a similar fashion Christensen (2011) argues that academics are the major actors together with the students in universities. Cheng (2009) agree and accentuate academics as a group of professionals highly affected by the introduction of market-based performance measurements. Therefore, the internal actors are arguably students as primary consumers, academics as the body of workers that effectively run universities and managers (Lewis et al., 2007; ter Bogt & Scapens 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Pettersen, 2015).

Universities was previously seen as “ivory towers of truth, knowledge and good scholarship” (Wedlin, 2008, p. 144) but the rise of NPM has resulted in a focus on output/outcomes rather than input and budgeting due to citizens’ demand for transparency, accountability and performance (Townley, 1997; Modell, 2003; Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Emery et al., 2008; Christensen, 2011; Northcott & Taulapapa, 2012; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Budding et al., 2015). The new academic environment subsequently reduced the level of academic freedom and increased accountability (Cheng, 2009; Christensen, 2011; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015). Thus, universities (academics and managers) are no longer exempted from performance measurements and public scrutiny (Townley, 1997; Christensen, 2011; cf. Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). In the NPM-era the evaluation of performance and quality materializes in the conversion from input (students and resources) into output (teaching and research) and subsequently outcomes (knowledge-based society) over time (Wedlin, 2008; Melo et al., 2010).

The lowest common denominator in the Swedish quality assurance system is academics as they efficaciously teach, administrate and conduct research within the universities (Christensen, 2011; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015). The formal evaluation system of UKÄ effectively evaluate whether the academics provide students with the necessary pre-requisite to meet the expected standard through the appraisal of application for degree-awarding (UKÄ, 2016a). Similarly, academics are under scrutiny when evaluating the institutional reviews of the universities’ quality assurance processes and the thematic evaluation since academics naturally are responsible for implementing changes in the norm (UKÄ, 2016a). The programme

evaluations can also be seen as a measurement of the teachers' pedagogical skills since the students' knowledge is plotted against the learning outcomes (UKÄ, 2016a).

### **3.5.1 Academics**

In the light of recent changes of accountability, the academic role has changed (Melo et al., 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013) and the managerial logics permeate the universities exerting pressure on the academics to deliver high quality teaching, research and administration with a diminishing level of resources and freedom (Cheng, 2009; Christensen, 2011; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015). In addition to the collision with managerial logic, the students and the service logic exert pressure to deliver high-quality education (Ng & Forbes, 2009). The academics are under pressure and the approach is not seen with kind eyes by academics such as Simmons (2002, p.91) in Pop-Vasileva et al. (2011) who proclaim that it is “unwarranted, unworkable and unacceptable...an infringement of academic freedom and an impediment to creativity and self-development”. In other words, the subscribers of managerial logic want efficiency whilst the subscribers of the academic logic want academic freedom.

The academics are evaluated in the aspects of research, teaching and administration (Cheng, 2009; Melo et al., 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). Research is measured in number of publications and the quality of the journal (e.g. Scopus, ISI etcetera.) and teaching is measured through students' experiences and perceptions mediated through student surveys, number of awarded degrees', number of students and number of supervised thesis and exams (Cheng, 2009; Melo et al., 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). The measures for administrative performance are not defined in the literature. The goal-achievement and efficiency is communicated through university websites, annual reports and the UKÄ database.

The focus on output has effectively promoted a culture of “publish or perish” in regards to research measurements (Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011) because it is the most readily available quantitative measurement for both the academics and managers (Melo et al., 2010). Ter Bogt and Scapens (2012) refer to the practice as a culture of “up-or-out”. Accordingly, “academics experience impingement on their autonomy and creative space through performance reviews, student evaluations, accreditation, . . . and pressure to publish, plan, predict, and perform according to negotiated standards” (Moses, 1996, p. 14 in Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011, p. 411).

Consequently, the tension between academics and measurements of performance creates problems.

### **3.6 Implications of performance measurements in universities**

The diverse users of information present the performance measurements systems with a design-problem of accommodating all interests. Lewis et al. (2007) claim that it is impossible for a generic tool to measure organizational performance in the complex university sector. Correspondingly, Guthrie and Neumann (2007) explain that there are too many factors to take into consideration that are beyond the institutions and academics control. Moreover, measuring outcomes relies both on students' perceptions and their ability to turn output (e.g. degree) into outcome (e.g. practical asset to society) (Pettersen, 2015). Thus, the tools need to be customized and anchored in the prevailing institutional logic (Lewis et al., 2007; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Pettersen, 2015; Caspersen et al., 2017). In other words, managers cannot simply measure the first easily quantified measurement (Lewis et al., 2007).

The increased level of accountability combined with the ambiguous nature between goals and indicators creates stress, anxiety and ultimately perverse behaviour (Pop-Vasileva, 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). Academics engage in gamesmanship such as “doctor stealing”, “cream skimming”, “embellishment” of output and “slicing research” with the objective to improve perceived performance (Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003; Yamamoto, 2004; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Vakkuri, 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015). In addition, “tunnel-vision” also occurs where academics disregard other duties due to a heavy focus on reaching output numbers (Modell, 2003; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). Furthermore, to pamper performance information academics prefer short-term projects with no risk over long-term innovative projects with a high risk (Yamamoto, 2004; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). Accordingly, the output increases and the illusion of increased performance is created but the effect on long-term outcomes (e.g. knowledge-based society) and quality are uncertain (ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Pettersen, 2015). Moreover, the gaming occurs in both teaching and research (Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Boitier & Rivière, 2013). However, the gaming is not seen as a perverse and despicable action despite the social contract between academics, students and society (Boitier & Rivière, 2013) but rather as a rational response to a flawed system of measuring performance (ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). Consequently, the cultures of up-or-out and publish or perish arise (Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). Pop-Vasileva et al. (2011) highlights that the current system does

not contemplate different areas of expertise (i.e. teaching or research) but rather generalizes the term “good performance” (Caspersen et al., 2017) with the consequence that creativity in teaching and research are limited (ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). In summary, the academic freedom and thus the passionate pursuit of innovative long-term projects has been reduced due to the strong focus on performance measurements (Cheng, 2009; Christensen, 2011; Frost & Brockmann, 2014; Pettersen, 2015).

Wedlin (2008) and Frost and Brockmann (2014) state that the measurement of performance puts academics in a performance paradox where they evaluate performance while simultaneously being under scrutiny. Consequently, the system can arguably be referred to as a peer-review system and thus in line with UKÄ’s claim. However, UKÄ and the new system do not seem to consider different institutional logics. The performance paradox in combination with the lack of coherence between institutional logics creates the questions how and why performance is measured. In other words, ambiguity is established which means that both the measurements and the measuring are susceptible to interpretation based on institutional logic (Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015; Caspersen et al., 2017). Academics are undeniable a part of the same profession (Cheng, 2009) but different logics is still bound to exist (Christensen, 2011; Kallio et al., 2015) and the same ought to apply for students and managers. Furthermore, the lack of a clear “how to use” the performance information anchors the notion of different interpretations based on institutional logic (Guthrie & Neumann, 2007). In other words, the new quality assurance systems can be seen as systematic organizational learning tools rather than a way of measuring performance and quality (Pettersen, 2015). The fact that UKÄ disclaims the comparability of evaluations between universities and programmes (UKÄ, 2016a) means that the performance information proves little practical value (Pettersen, 2015) because it is not put into a relation (Boitier & Rivière, 2013). However, the formal performance measurements are not the study’s focus but, it is nevertheless paramount to understand the performance measurement system, the flaws and the influence of ambiguity and institutional logics, to some extent when exploring managers, academics and students use of performance information.

### **3.7 Model**

Founded on literature presented in the theoretical framework the managers, academics and students are the main internal actors and users of performance information. The use of information is ambiguous as both the tools used and the managerial logic behind the use conflicts with the traditional academic logic. The service logic fuels the pressure on academics

as the students demand what they considered to be a high-quality service. The study explores how managers, academics and students use the performance information. The model depicted below represents the established area of enquiry.

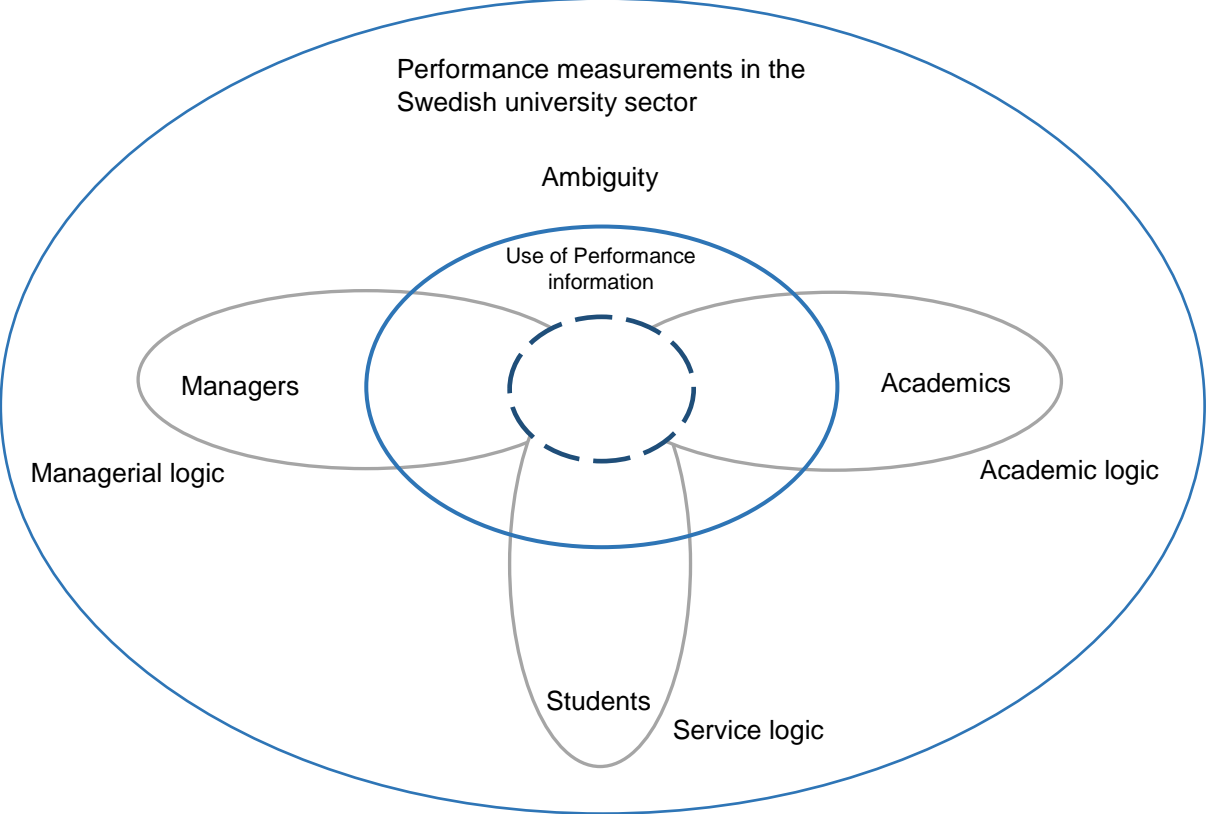


Figure 3.1 – The use of performance information under conditions of conflicting institutional logics and ambiguity



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## 4. Empirical method

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“The empirical material should reflect the research question at all times. There are good reasons to stick do this, because it can be more complicated than first appeared”<sup>6</sup> (Alvehus, 2013, p. 31). The data collection, sample, analytical methods and the ethical considerations must be properly presented to ensure and increase the credibility and quality of the study (Yin, 2014). In the following sections these matters are presented and discussed.

### 4.1 Data collection

The primary data were gathered using interviews since it is well-suited for the investigation of how people think, feel and act (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013). Thus, appropriate for this study due to the purpose of exploring how managers, academics and students use performance information. However, Alvehus (2013) ushers caution and explains that researchers “have long romanticized the image of interviews as a way of getting “closer” to the respondents and generate more credible answers than questionnaires” (s. 81) and subsequently highlights problems accompanying interviews. Most notable the author stresses the importance of describing the format properly to the readers (e.g. what type of interview) as it can have a monumental effect on the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. In addition, researchers are advised to not drift off course, ask too many questions, fear silence and to utilize follow up questions, show a genuine interest and sometimes provoke respondents in avoidance (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013). Furthermore, interviews are best used as a research method if the researcher has a good theoretical knowledge, ability to listen and adapt the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Yin, 2014).

Yin (2014) state that it is of importance for a case study that the collected data is closely connected to the theoretical issues and stress the need for “good questions” when conducting interviews (p. 73-74). In practice, a good question is a “how” and not a “why” since respondent might take offence and experience the interview as an interrogation. Similarly, Alvehus (2013) state that questions must be secondary and the information primary. Too many questions could potentially mean that focus shifts from listening to “trying to address all questions” (p. 83). A good listener is also exemplified as an essential skill for a researcher conducting interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). In other words, knowing when and how to speak if one is going to speak but also to have an open mind to the information. It is paramount

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<sup>6</sup> Translated and paraphrased from Swedish to English.

to not allow the information to influence your mind in a negative way such as judging the respondent based on the answer (Yin, 2014).

This study utilizes semi-structured interview as a format due to the possibilities to use follow-up questions. In addition, broader thematic questions allow for a relaxed conversation rather than the regurgitation of a questionnaire in an interview setting (Alvesson, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). The interviews can be labelled as shorter case study interviews as they varied in length with the shortest being 30 minutes and the longest 90 minutes (Yin, 2014). The majority of the interviews were approximately one hour long. A total of 12 interviews were conducted. In addition, fewer questions with an open-ended nature means that the focus is directed towards the respondent and the information rather than the questions (Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). The purpose of the study implies that the managers, academics and students own experience and thoughts on the use of performance information is paramount (Yin, 2014). Therefore, a questionnaire would not have been a practical method of gathering the data as it would have meant interpretation of quantitative data provided by respondents that potentially misunderstood questions or the research question and thus, missing key expressions and subtle tells that could have been pursued with follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2014). In other words, the follow-up questions are key as they allow for rigor (i.e. staying within the subject) without rigidity (i.e. fixed questions and structure) (Yin, 2014). However, Alvesson (2011) stresses caution regarding follow-up questions as it enables steering of the conversation. Yin (2014) refers to this a guidance and suggest that it is one of the strengths of semi-structured interview but Alvesson (2011) points to the fact that researchers can instantaneously decide the direction of the conversation by simply pursuing a positive or negative reflection by the respondent to guide the person in question into an up-lifting happy path of thought or a path of failure and deceit. The remedy to this ailment could potentially be a disciplined used of silence and thus allowing the respondent to develop their own thoughts and ideas (Alvesson, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvehus, 2013). The guiding use of follow-up questions should not be confused with leading questions as they are misplaced at all times (Yin, 2014). Personal bias is however a real factor in the chosen methodology (Alvesson, 2011).

The expressions of behaviours are prone to problem such as the lack of articulate skills to express behaviour in a comprehensive way (Alvesson, 2011). Additionally, respondents cannot generally be assumed to have neither the mental capacity nor the willingness to do so according to Alvesson (2011). Yin (2014) confer and claim that respondents' answers are "subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation" (p. 113).

Furthermore, the draw towards confirming the information via comparison might arise but should be avoided as it deviates from the study's purpose (i.e. not comparing the managers, academics and students) (Yin, 2014). In addition, respondents can and probably will indulge in impression management and scripted behaviour (e.g. political correctness) (Alvesson, 2011). However, the setting of a university suggests that the problem of limited intelligence and articulation are non-issues (Alvesson, 2011). The commonality and familiarity with research and master theses at the university will most likely mean that the need to define language and find a common frame of reference to enable a productive conversation is redundant (Alvesson, 2011). However, the purpose of exploring how performance information is used suggests that the concept of performance in universities presents a problem as performance can mean many different things in different settings (Alvesson, 2011).

The human factor in information processing is always open to question and Yin (2015) highlights the possible problem of reflexivity which essentially means that the respondent gradually adapts answers to fit the line of enquiry and the researcher will adapt questions based on answers with the result of data non-corresponding to the research question. Yet, Alvesson (2011) refers to reflexivity as something positive that influences the researcher during the investigation and constitutes the approach of constantly challenging the pre-conceived notion of information processing and embracing a multi-perspective. In other words, acknowledging and utilizing the fact that several possible explanations for the observed behaviour or answer are possible. Yin (2014) claim that researcher must keep this in mind when evaluating the credibility of a case study. The chosen methodology represents a formidable challenge to overcome, especially as a lone researcher in a limited amount of time (10 weeks), but one can only take precautions to a certain degree (Alvesson, 2011). Sooner or later, ready or not, it is ultimately about conducting the research. Similarly, Yin (2014) explain that some factors are out of the researcher's hand since a case study is not an experiment where data is collected in a routinized way and held to certain predetermined standards but rather an exploration of people and actions (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Yin, 2014).

## **4.2 Sample selection**

There is a common belief that sampling in qualitative research is of less importance than sample selection in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The misconception is fostered and accepted because of the notion that representativeness in qualitative research is trivial (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Irrespectively of the representativeness, transparency is paramount in a case study as the method itself discerns questions regarding the researcher's capability and thus

performance (see section 2.2). Thus, the choices and assumption must be displayed and explained to the utmost carefulness to pre-caution against a lack of transparency and the consequence that the study becomes invalid (Yin, 2014). The sample in this study is divided into a geographical location (HKR) and representatives of users (managers, academics and students) (Alvesson, 2011; Yin, 2014). They are presented in the following sections.

#### **4.2.1 Kristianstad University**

Kristianstad University (HKR) realized a fundamental reform in the year of 2008. The objective was to unite the organization and to become more cost-effective (see section 3.1.2 Kristianstad University). In addition, a performance and quality based research funding was introduced in 2014/2015 and a system of promoting pedagogical skills was introduced in 2012 (see section 3.1.2 Kristianstad University). HKR's current staff consists of 490 workers including 166 employees labelled PhDs whereof 26 are professors, 181 labelled non-PhDs and the remaining 143 employees are labelled administration and technical support (HKR, 2017a). In the fiscal year of 2016 the number of students amounted to 13 700 (71% women and 29% men) (HKR, 2017a). Revenues for fiscal year of 2016 were 487 million SEK whereof 420 million (14 % external) were denominated to first- and second-cycle education and 67 million (21 % external) to research and third-cycle education (HKR, 2017a). The university has the status of a university college<sup>7</sup> with the implications on the ability to award certain types of degrees. Universities are allowed to award first-, second- (one-year and two-year Masters' degrees) and third-cycle degrees while university colleges are allowed to award first- and second-cycle degrees (one-year Masters' degrees) (UKÄ, 2017n). University colleges can apply for the entitlement to award two-year Masters' degrees and third-cycle degrees but only in specific programmes. In other words, the entitlement does not mean that the university college is formally allowed to award two-year masters in all programmes (UKÄ, 2017n).

HKR articulated its vision of educating Sweden's most employable students during the years of 2013-2014 (HKR, 2014; HKR, 2015). In the fiscal year of 2015 HKR welcomed a new vice-chancellor (UKÄ, 2016a). The vision of educating employable students arguably remains as a goal but the vision has changed to "The university shall welcome all students and support their learning. Even students that see higher education as an almost insurmountable challenge"<sup>8</sup> (HKR, 2016a, p. 26). HKR are not following the general trend in Sweden where student applications for HE are reducing by roughly 2 percent on an annual basis. Student applications

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<sup>7</sup> *Högskola* in Swedish

<sup>8</sup> Translated from Swedish

at HKR increased by 4 percent consequently breaking the 40 000 applicant-barrier (fiscal year 2017). HKR is Sweden's 8<sup>th</sup> most sought institution for HE and the top sought university college (HKR, 2017b). Most sought out programme per seat at HKR is the Higher Education in behavioural science at a bachelor level with 4 060 applicants competing for 60 seats. The NPM-influenced reform, the application pressure and national popularity combined with the fact that 76 percent of students at HKR comes from non-academic household (HKR, 2017c) suggests that HKR are a part of the new academic era referred to as mass-education by Yamamoto (2004), Ng and Forbes (2009), Melo et al. (2010) and Christensen (2011) and thus a suitable choice of institution for this study.

HKR are not formally allowed to award third-cycle degrees in but a few areas yet 15 doctoral students (registered at third-cycle education in Lund and Linköping) are employed at HKR. Academics from HKR are currently supervising the 15 doctoral students in addition to handful a of doctoral students outside of the HKR labour force (fiscal year of 2016) (HKR, 2017a). Additionally, academics regularly attend international conferences, participate in third-cycle courses and co-operate in research projects with institutions with the status of university (HKR, 2017a). Thus, suggesting high research quality. The connection to the practice of “doctor stealing” (see section 3.6 Implications of performance measurements in universities) is arguably evident as the doctoral student's degrees will be awarded at a different institution and thus adding to their presentation of university performance. Nevertheless, the strong research performance is evident among the senior researchers as well. For example, HKR operate Scandinavia's leading research laboratory for analysis of medical residues in the environment. It is a part of a multinational cooperation involving around 20 organization and the project recently received a grant of 15 million SEK from the European Union. The project is named MORPHEUS (HKR, 2017e; SR, 2017).

The quality assurance system used by UKÄ prior to the system launched in 2017 and bound for action 2017-2020 (see section 3.1 Institutionalities – the Swedish context) concluded that all HKR programmes are of high quality or very high quality. In addition, the programmes of Business Administration, Food and Meal Science and Oral Health on a bachelor level and the Master Programme in Psychology are one of few programmes in Sweden to receive the highest possible evaluation mark of very high quality (HKR, 2017a). The high-quality education is not only recognized in Sweden. A recent example is a master thesis, converted into article-format that was accepted by the highly prestigious Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal (HKR, 2017f).

In sum, the strong research base, both in doctoral students (HKR, 2017d) and academics combined with the strong evaluations from UKÄ and the international acknowledgement of the high-quality thesis' produced at HKR suggest that HKR is by no means left behind the rest of Sweden's institutions for HE. Thus, HKR is suitable for this study.

#### **4.2.2 Respondents**

The respondents were chosen via a purposive sampling because of the coherence with the case study method as neither will allow for conclusive findings and statistical generalization but nevertheless provides the research field and organization with a platform to build upon (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Yin, 2014). The promise of future research and empirical testing is also a strength of the sampling method coherent with a case study (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Yin, 2014). Important to note is that the respondents, as individuals, are not of supreme interest as they represent an investigated set of users included to successfully fulfil the study's purpose of exploring how internal actors use performance information (see section 2.2 Research method).

The use of performance information is assumed to be affected by ambiguity and institutional logics (see section 3.6 Implications of performance measurements in universities) as previous research (Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; Kallio et al., 2015) have presented information suggesting that different Schools (equal to a faculty) might constitute different approaches and experiences regarding the NPM-influences tools. Thus, both the School of Education and Environment and the School of Health and Society are included in the study to possibly highlight (but not compare) differences. The individuals will, of course, differ in opinion regardless of Schools as only two academics per School were interviewed and they both carry different emotional baggage and experiences (Hoque et al., 2013). However, to somewhat mitigate the effect the academics were chosen on the basis of research and teaching skills, as it is the primary measurement of the academics according to the literature. One academic strong in research and one strong in teaching were thus included from both Schools. The criteria were sent to a key informant within the organization who refereed what constitutes a strong researcher and teacher. The informant rationale for the selection and a thorough description would regrettably seriously compromise the academics anonymity and is therefore not included in the study (see section 4.5 Ethical considerations). Moreover, the key informant suggested contact via e-mail and approved the mentioning of his/her name in the e-mail. The granted access is however not without questioning as the informant possibly guided the direction of the study and the presented information (selective) through the choice of academics (Alvesson, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2011). The personal recommendation included in the e-mail suggests that the relationship

between the academics and the informant is not under stress. In other words, there might be academics more suited to the task of representing well performing teachers and researchers (Alvesson, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Yet, the positive of the (possibly) good relationship between the academics and the informant is that the recommendation suggests that the respondents are open for the idea of the study and prepared to contribute and not just participate (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The head of the School of Education and Environment was unable to participate in the study. The vice-head of the School filled the spot. The head of the School of Health and Society participated. The vice-chancellor of HKR is included because he ought to represent the peak of power and managerial discretion. In addition, his mentioning of student satisfaction and quality assurance in the annual reports suggests that he has an interest in the study and its results. Moreover, the change to a performance-based research allocation system suggest that the research board acts as managers in the matter of evaluating potential promise in research performance (see section 3.1.2 Kristianstad University). The head of the research board is thus included in the study. In short, the vice-chancellor, head of the research board and head and vice-head of Schools represent managers. The key informant provided the contact information of the four managers.

The students were chosen on the basis of educational performance. Two students with a strong educational performance and two students with a weaker educational performance were chosen. The measurement of educational strength weighted academic grades, engagement, and willingness to learn and not only partake in the education and most importantly, if they were following the prescribed programme curriculum. In other words, if a student is held back, he/she is considered a student with a weaker educational performance. Similarly, a student who only partake or merely studies to pass exams are considered students with weaker educational performance. The ethical dimension of singling out students as weaker in performance meant that the academics of HKR were unwilling to aid in the selection. Consequently, my personal circle of contacts and the method of word of mouth were utilized in order to choose the students. The sample method is referred to as convenience sample method (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The idea behind students with a strong educational performance and with a weaker educational performance is based on Pop-Vasileva et al. (2011) who report that low student motivation and engagement negatively affects academics in the new era of mass education and NPM technology. Students ought to be motivated and engaged in the performance information as primary consumers investing time and money. Yet, the idea of mass education suggests

otherwise (Ng & Forbes, 2009). In other words, some students are conscious consumers (i.e. studies to learn beyond the exams) and some students are indifferent (i.e. disregard the programme curriculum or merely study to pass the exam) (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Thus, the chosen students represent the two extremes. The crudeness in choosing two extremes is acknowledged as it more likely a spectrum of motivation and engagement. In addition, several reasons for not following the prescribed programme curriculum can arguably be identified. For example, exchange semesters, personal problems, family deaths etcetera ought to disrupt the prescribed curriculum or potentially distance the student from learning and thus solely focusing on passing exams. Nevertheless, the weaker performing students represent the “student of mass education” and the strong student represents the choice-aware and engaged consumer. Below the reader will find a description of the respondents. The academics and students are not thoroughly described due to the promise of anonymity.

➤ Vice-chancellor – referred to as VC.

He has been the vice-chancellor since March 2015 (HKR, 2016a). He has been involved in academia for approximately 30 years and has prior experience in a managerial position at both HKR and Lund University School of Economics and Management (HKR, 2017g). The managerial responsibility at HKR was as head of Department of Business Administration and head of the School of Education and Environment and as the programme director for a Master’s programme in management in Lund. He is an associate professor in business administration (HKR, 2017g).

➤ Head of the research board – referred to as RB

The head of the research board cannot be anonymous because of his position. There is only one, at the given location at the given time. However, as his persona is not of great importance but rather the managerial position he represents his name will not be mentioned. He can be regarded as highly qualified as he is a Professor in didactics with a research focus on evaluations and grades. He was nominated and elected by his peers through a collegial vote because of his “department neutrality” within the institution.

➤ Head of School of Health and Society – referred to as HS

Similarly to the head of the research board, the head of School of Health and Society cannot be anonymous because of her position. Her persona is not of great importance for this study but



rather the managerial position she represents. Her name will therefore not be mentioned. She is an associate professor in oral health and disputed in 2004 in the field of odontological science.

- Vice-head of School of Education and Environment – referred to as EE

The vice-head of School of Education and Environment filled the seat of her senior in an appropriate fashion. She cannot be anonymous because of her position but she will not be named in this study. In addition to being the vice-head of School of Education and Environment she is also the head of the psychology department and head of psychology programme. She is a lector in psychology and her primary focus of research is personality psychology.

- Academic strong in research. School of EE – referred to as REE
- Academic strong in teaching. School of EE – referred to as TEE
- Academic strong in research. School of HS – referred to as RHS
- Academic strong in teaching. School of HS – referred to as THS
- Student, strong performance – School of EE – referred to as SEE
- Student, weaker performance – School of EE – referred to as WEE
- Student, strong performance – School of HS – referred to as SHS
- Student, weaker performance – School of HS – referred to as WHS

A total of 12 interviews were conducted.

### **4.3 Operationalization/conceptualization**

The chosen method of semi-structured interviews are common in case study practice as it provides the researcher with the opportunity to capture “why” and “how” something happens (Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). The direct question “why” can be seen as intrusive and should be used coupled with a “how” question to not offend the respondent (Yin, 2014). In order to cohere with the format of semi-structured interviews a few broader questions are included in the interview guides accompanied by follow-up questions (Alvesson, 2011; Alvehus, 2013; Yin, 2014). The questions are rather naïve to inspire the respondent to provide the topic with fresh ideas (Yin, 2014). In other words, they can reflect openly without the risk of being judged by someone with superior subject knowledge. Two interview guides were utilized, one for the academics and managers and one for the students. The questions are similar with minor adjustments (see Appendix 1 - Interview guide – academics and managers and Appendix 2 Interview guide – students). The questions included in the interview guide are guide marks rather than mandatory questions. Bryman and Bell (2011) refers to the interview guide as “a brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered” (p. 473). In other words, the questions

represent the information of interest but depending on the respondent, general flow of the conversation, the familiarity and sense of comfort from the respondent the questions were not necessarily explicitly asked. Furthermore, the concept of start, middle and end of an interview explained by Alvesson (2011) is evident throughout the interview guides. Alvesson (2011) explains that the start of an interview is used to familiarize and get comfortable with each other, the middle is where the questions one wants answers to is asked and the end is where the respondent is invited to give complementary information or revise some of the provided answers.

The follow-up questions trailing performance and performance measuring were intended to conceptualize institutional logic and ambiguity. Are they willing to use the tools? Do they prefer the peer-review system and disdain the measuring? Thus, arguably subscribing to the managerial logic? Do they consider the measuring of performance as a necessary practice and thus, arguably, subscribe to the managerial logic? Are the academics aware of why they are measuring performance or is it ambiguous? Are they aware of how to use the tools or are the tools ambiguous? Is there any ambiguity surrounding the use of the information they must provide? The use of *why* questions as a follow-up question and not a lead question is to provoke the respondent into reflecting and answering without being defensive. The interview guide for the students follows the same outlines as above with minor adjustments. The students were invited to reflect openly about academic and university performance, what kinds of measurements they use to evaluate performance and how the information is used.

#### **4.4 Analytical method**

The case description must be penetrated by the theory and accordingly display a theoretical understanding from the researcher (Scapens, 2004). However, the constant referring to theory is not necessary as the data is related to theoretical framework with the help of appropriate sub-headings (Scapens, 2004). In order to ease the categorization of the collected data, the interviews were transcribed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In addition to the audio recorded, notes were taken during the interviews. The notes outlined general concepts or emerging themes (e.g. this suggests a defence mechanism) during the interview rather than word for word accounting. The fact that the interviews were recorded lessen the need for detailed notes (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and allowed for the focus on the information rather than constantly taking notes and thus, mitigating a potential scenario where the researcher becomes disconnected from the conversation (Alvesson, 2011; Alvehus, 2013). However, it is important to note that the audio recording is by no means a substitute for listening (Yin, 2014). No external help was utilized in

regards to the transcribing, thus reducing the level of errors and misinterpretations of subtle tells from the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The gathered empirical data are related to the theoretical framework using the method of thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is per Alvehus (2013) more of a thematic interpretation as the information matters and not the words themselves even though they represent the information. A balance between analysis and interpretation were the data is thematically organized with the theoretical framework in mind, followed by the reduction of material and lastly by the argumentation for the conclusions will provide the reader with an interesting qualitative analysis (Alvehus, 2013). Yin (2014) refers to the method more specifically as pattern matching and explains that, despite an exploratory purpose, pattern matching is a valid and suitable method of analysing the empirics given that the concepts are clearly defined. The empirics will be related to the concepts of ambiguity and institutional logics. Furthermore, the use of performance information will be related to the discussion revolving the symbolic use, use-value and performance information as a base for decisions.

To enable a decent analysis one must not reduce the material to much as contradictions and different opinions are key in any analysis (Alvehus, 2013). However, the focus of the study is not to compare managers, academics and student (see section 2.2 Research method). Nonetheless, paradoxes might be present within each category possibly due to the subscription of different institutional logics. Furthermore, the draw to over-simplistic explanations when exploring complex decisions, organizations and contradictions must be avoided (Scapens, 2004; Alvehus, 2013; Hoque et al., 2013). Alvesson (2011) makes the same remark and cautions the practice of claiming that “this is how it is”. In addition, the method of thematic analysis is prone to losing the social context where the information is positioned with the practice of cutting and pasting thematic bits of information (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

The purpose of the study is to explore how managers, academics and students use performance information. In other words, it is a matter of human affairs (Yin, 2014). The case study format enhances the potential risks for repercussions for individuals that disclose a more than socially accepted amount of information (Alvesson, 2011; Yin, 2014). The weak respondent description (see section 4.2.2 Respondents) is valid because there is always a risk of being punished for disclosing sensitive information (Alvesson, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Yin, 2014).

Yin (2014) checklist for ethical considerations include the pointers: gaining informed consent, avoiding deception, privacy and confidentiality, protection of vulnerable groups and selecting respondents equitably. The checklist was considered in this study in order to protect the respondents. Bryman and Bell (2011) advocates a similar checklist. Respondents were informed about the topic and the study's purpose and thus minimizing the risk for uninformed consent to participate based on deception. Furthermore, anonymity was promised to the academics and students. The academics and students were not chosen based on ethnicity, sexual orientation or political views. Thus, the respondents were selected in equitably fashion as no one is included or excluded based on unfair grounds.

The vice-chancellor, head of the research board and the head and vice-head of Schools cannot be anonymous due to their position at HKR. The names will not be mentioned because their persona is not the focal of the study but rather their roles as managers. Information about the individuals can be found on HKR official webpage.

#### **4.6 Validity, reliability and generalizability**

Research in business traditionally use quantitative methods and subsequently discuss reliability, validity and generalizability when evaluating a study (Scapens, 2004). However, in case study research the collection of data is not routinized and the research process is not necessarily linear and preconceived notions and experiences essentially makes it impossible to conduct a case study without bias (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2014). In other words, the study's results and conclusions are subjective since there is no objective world waiting to be observed (Scapens, 2004; Alvesson, 2013; Hoque et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Thus, the researcher is the weakest link (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2014). Moreover, one must be aware of the political and societal pressures the respondents adhere to. For example, the vice-chancellor cannot be expected to make bold proclamations or controversial statements as he is a public official without the protection of anonymity. Scapens (2004) state that the traditional measures of evaluating a study is unfitting for a case study and advocates that the discussion should focus on procedural reliability, contextual validity and transferability.

Procedural reliability means that the researcher has utilized appropriate methods and procedures whereas the traditional reliability means that another researcher can replicate the study by following the steps outlined in the study (Scapens, 2004). In case study research the process of research is, at best, somewhat linear and this makes it difficult to replicate the study based on the outlined steps (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2014). Scapens (2004) explains that procedural reliability is more about seeing what has been done and subsequently determine whether the

study is reliable or not. The audio recordings and field notes increase the procedural reliability of the study (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2014). Unfortunately, a technical problem occurred in the interview with RHS. The audio recorder failed to record the first (approximately) 25 minutes. The problem was mitigated by the fact that the RHS was kind enough to provide official HKR documents with a similar content of what RHS talked about. The missed conversations revolved around RHS work, performance measurements in RHS's department and the process of applying for research means. In addition, as soon as the technical problem was discovered key bits of information were written down to mitigate the potential loss of information. The provided material complemented the field notes but key notes such as a change in voice or the remembrance of subtle tells when listening and transcribing the interview was lost. Furthermore, the audio recorder was, upon request, turned off during approximately 10 minutes during THS's interview. THS disclosed personal opinions regarding a colleague teaching performance. The information could not have been collected with the audio recorder turned on. Nevertheless, the thorough presentation of choices made in this study suggest an acceptable procedural reliability but the fact that the rationale for the choices of a strong research and teaching academic is not disclosed limits the study from a high procedural reliability (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2014).

Contextual validity can be seen as a replacement measurement for the traditional internal validity measuring whether inferences due to faulty arguments or gaps in the empirical data affect the study's conclusions (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2014). The measurement is generally best applicable to explanatory studies rather than exploratory (Yin, 2014). The thematic method of analysis means that not all lines of evidence are clear as one has to choose what to include and not to include (Alvehus, 2013; Hoque et al., 2013). Thus, the contextual validity is difficult to evaluate. Moreover, this study has an exploratory nature with the consequent that the empirics cannot be statistically generalized (Yin, 2014). Additionally, the concept of institutional logics combined with ambiguity suggests that individuals use information differently and thus stifling the ability to analytically generalize (Hoque et al., 2013). Scapens (2004) refers to Lincoln and Guba (1985) when explaining that transferability is a better concept than generalization and state that "the transferability of the findings from one context to another and "fittingness" as to the degree of comparability of different contexts" (p. 269) is better suited for case studies as "the only generalisation is: there is no generalisation (p. 269).

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## 5. Empirical results

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A total of 12 interviews were conducted, transcribed and subsequently thematically analysed. The chapter is divided into subcategories of managers, academics and students followed by a summary and a model.

### 5.1 Managers

The managers were confident going into the interviews and consequently displayed the level of assertiveness that one could predict. After all, they are highly experienced academics who wrestle with other strong-willed academics as VC and HS put it. RB, HS and EE all have experience from different vice-chancellors and unanimously state that every vice-chancellor imprints the institution during the time on the post. In the words of EE, “every boss leaves his mark”. The referring to VC as the boss is not the exception. VC himself discussed the role as vice-chancellor in terms of the CEO in a large multinational company:

If you are the manager in a corporation in France and the group management team are in Stockholm, you still have too...you are totally alone and responsible for the business but you still belong to a group where you compete. I think you must see it that way! In Sweden as well. That we as a university sector. We are 30 units in Sweden, some large and some small, but together we form the Swedish system of higher education and we compete with the Chinese and Americans...

The reference to a business group is elaborated by VC:

The Swedish university sector as a group...I don't see us and primary competitors but rather as...rather as...like we are units in the university system of Sweden. That we belong to the Swedish university entity as a system so to speak...where we play different parts and support each other in different ways...but also compete! Kind of like the way you do in a big corporation. If you imagine a multinational corporation with different units competing for resources. To a certain extent. But they also help each other. And there is a group management team.

VC explained that there are four parts to the “group management team” who holds him responsible for his actions. It is the department of education, Secretary of government, UKÄ and the board of directors at HKR.

The managers explained that the letter of appropriation dictates the level of discretion they have in their daily operations and the strategic choices they make. VC explained:

We are allowed to choose our programmes with certain exceptions. Because we have orders from above that we must educate in teaching, pre-school and nursing. Other than that, we are allowed to choose. But we have...we cannot just initiate an education of say, opera singers. We need to apply for permission and degree awarding rights.

HS uphold the fact that is a matter of team-work when trying to compete as a smaller university. There is constant decision-making and one must be strategic since the system allocates resources based on the number of students. However, VC and EE highlights that the university is only allowed to educate a certain number of students. This presents a problem. The managers must choose which courses and programmes to continuously provide and which courses and programmes to discontinue. On a strategic level (i.e. organizational level) the performance is measured in number of students, flow of students (i.e. how many apply and complete courses) and finances. The performance information is not used to improve the different programmes, something that VC pointed out:

I wouldn't say improve...that I...rather allocate resources.

HS and EE concur and explains that they are responsible for sending the question of quality down the hierarchy to the head of programs that continuously work with the quality of education. The managers do not interfere with this work but rather ask questions and demand results. As VC and HS explained, if there is a course evaluation or a budget deficit we must ask questions. "Deficits must be questioned" as VC put it. The people responsible must be held accountable for their actions and provide a reasoning for their deficit or poor performance and provide a plan to improve it. The sense that academics are free to plan, conduct and complete courses as they see fit given that they uphold high quality and reasonable financial performance is overwhelming.

The managers did not have a hard time providing examples and reasoning when discussing academic performance. As one could image, they were fairly assertive. HS asserted that commitment, pre-disposition for development and the ability to cooperate are necessary to be a high-performing academic. Again, HS explains that cooperation is important saying that it is a matter of internal and external co-operation. Thus, the societal part of an academic life is not to be dismissed. Said by HS:

We are supposed to...the surrounding society...we have a societal mission as well!

EE similarly state that a high-performing academic is someone who is a “good researcher” and a “good educator” meaning that you publish articles, attract external research means while possessing the ability to convey the research to the students in a comprehensible manner. However, when discussing current methods of measuring good research and education performance both HS and EE agree that it is non-representative of actual performance. Yet, as EE put it:

It is the academic tradition.

RB asserted scepticism towards the collegial system of performance measuring and explained that there are too many factors and it is impossible to be objective. HS and EE concur. The accreditation system is more or less based on subjective evaluations. Said by RB in short:

We have far too much faith in these kinds of systems.

Nevertheless, the opinions differ slightly as EE stated that the measuring of research through journal impact index is “fairly reliable”. RB oppose the reasoning as he stated that publications, citations etcetera is a crude measurement and should not be seen as reliable. He would prefer outside experts to decide whether research performance is of high or low quality but understands that it is a matter of resources. HS and VC both distance themselves from the measuring of research performance and state that the peer-review system, albeit flawed, is the best available option. VC confidently asserted that several years in the sphere of academia has resulted in great insight in terms of how the incentives in academia are constructed. He states that the accreditation system is skewed in the following manner:

I guess the accreditation system favours research over teaching...it is more beneficial to be a researcher than to be a leader of manager...and to us, that have dedicated a lot of time to be managers and leaders or have dedicated a lot of time and energy to build programmes. I guess a lot of us feel that it is unfair or unbalanced...while the researchers see it as the height of fairness...so it is a matter of balancing the two roles.

The managers all concluded that it is no easy match to measure and thus quantify performance. RB explained that the research board essentially evaluated the structure rather than the actual research when evaluating applications for the performance-based research means. RB:

You do not get a high-level evaluation but rather a shallow evaluation.

Furthermore, the competition for resources at a small university created internal conflict of great magnitude across disciplines and RB explained that a survey was conducted among the



academics and the result was unanimous: the system is of poor quality and must be replaced. The performance-based research allocation system is currently suspended and under construction per RB and VC. RB explained that VC used the system to premier certain fields of research connected to the first-cycle education with a large body of students. The resistance was great and some academics in the research board even resigned in protest.

The managers explained that the focus of VC can largely be connected to the maintaining and instituting of quality. EE said that is only natural that VC and HKR focus on learning rather than research as the university lacks doctoral programmes. Thus, the focus should be on first-cycle education (i.e. bachelor level). EE evaluates the quality continuously during the course as she sees the course evaluation as a blunt way of measuring performance. There are several problems accompanying the course evaluation and students are often raving about things outside of their comprehension. HS acknowledges the same problem. HS prefers questionnaires sent to alumni-students who have had the chance of testing their skills and knowledge in the practical life, “out on the job” as HS put it. Nevertheless, the communication between students and teachers, the level of flow (admitted students that complete the course) and the last box in the course evaluation where students can write freely is used to gauge the performance of the academic. If it is not up to par, the managers have a one-to-one conversation about their performance and how to improve it.

Both HS and EE highlighted the problem with centralized governance documents dictating how to measure academic performance. HS explained that it can be “frustrating” and “confusing at times” when you must talk and document certain areas during appraisals despite it being unfit for the situation. EE similarly explained that the evaluations are not coherent with part-time courses. To combat the problem with centralized governance documents VC highlighted the decentralized model of governance and the understanding of the problems at hand. VC stated:

The aggregated numbers such as admission, flow of students, finances and course evaluations. I mean they are a part of it! But you also have to...compare...set against...the more anecdotal qualitative conversations that occur...and...sometimes it can be brought to my attention that...like...”the quality in that programme is poor. That is no academia, it is on a upper-secondary level”. Fine! Then you can check the course evaluations or something else. So, you set these two measures against one another...So you have to be open to accept...open to handle...both quantitative and qualitative measures.

HS pointed out that she uses a similar strategy where she utilizes both quantitative measures and qualitative measures to get the whole picture of a situation. However, she acknowledged that she does not use the qualitative measure to the same extent as the quantitative because she feels that it gets somewhat “dopey” fairly quick. Nevertheless, HS stated the following when explaining that one type of measurement must be combined with other measurements to produce a larger picture:

It becomes a part of ...if you say. Puzzle...if becomes a part of the puzzle.

VC continued his train of thought on the effect of using both quantitative and qualitative measures in performance measuring:

I guess that the biggest and most important effect is that they know that we are interested. Then...it becomes important for the individual.

The managers accentuated that they are confident using the performance information and asserts that there are no doubts to what the information is supposed to be used for. VC’s focus on quality stands clear. Yet, there are some ambiguous tendencies in the measuring of performance but is it related to UKÄ. VC stated that it is ever changing and they are not one hundred percent certain of what UKÄ will premier or regard as high quality. He explained that the new system focuses on the institutions own governance documents. UKÄ does not say “we want this”, they say “we want you to have something of this nature”. He continued, “we comply and create such a document and initiate the processes of quality assurance that the document assert. UKÄ subsequently evaluates the governance document and the process.” HS pointed out that the previous system where criticises but she did however sympathize with the difficulty of measuring academic performance:

Well, it is difficult...because there are different factors...ehhh...to measure...to measure is a quantitative term and it is more often qualitative measure...

The managers use the performance information as an indication of academic performance and its relation to course quality. Furthermore, the information is used to decide which course or programme to discontinue and to whom to exhort improvements in teaching. In extreme cases the performance information is used to decide whether an academic is discharges due to misconduct or failure to meet expectations of quality. EE argued that it is a way to aid the academics in their personal development. For example, the course evaluations indicate that courses with a poor score on the 5-point scale are courses given the first time or it is a first-time

teacher on the particular course and the remedy for the problem could be, per VC, a support structure of colleagues critically examining the course and providing feedback to improve the academic's performance and thus the quality of the course. Moreover, the performance information is used to set the salary of academics and the managers themselves. VC is responsible for setting the salary of the other managers. In addition to the individual dimension of the use of performance information (i.e. salary-setting, discharge etc.) the managers use the information to premier and steer the institution in the wanted direction. A normative dimension per HS:

Then I will use the information of those who successfully did something to urge the rest of the staff to act in the same way.

VC highlighted that the influence and steering of academic personnel is not without problems as they are strong-willed and occasionally reject change. VC explained that sometimes change is seen as an intrusion of academic freedom by a small group of academics. The strength to act is thus needed to assert that academic freedom has nothing to do with not following the rules of the institution. "The university is funded by the Swedish people through tax-money and thus not a playground where you are allowed to do as you please." as VC put it. VC pointed out that sometimes you must communicate this message to certain individuals. However, the resistance is natural per HS because the fact that academics are sceptical by nature and this sometimes means the refusal to follow the stream. The attempt to create a stream and share practices within that stream combined with the focus on quality and accountability (i.e. no playground) are per VC the use of performance information to affect the organizational culture. There will be conflicts and there will be resistance but "sometimes you just have to coordinate your practices". VC ended in a seemingly appropriate fashion when claiming that performance information must be acted upon and:

It...cannot be...it cannot be a symbolic question and something that you do for the sake of doing it.

## **5.2 Academics**

The academics expressed both gratitude and disdain for the performance measurements used at HKR. RHS are content with the current system and explained that in the field of research where she is active there is a carefully developed method of evaluating research. It is a two-step process where a research proposal is sent to a committee of the financiers that evaluate the societal value. If the proposal passes, it goes through step 2, an academic scrutiny. As RHS expressed it, "there has to be a value for the businesses where we do our research. They must

get something back. Publication is important but not our first priority”. She continues to explain that the citizens are number one as her research is funded by three levels of tax-money and consequently feels great responsibility towards society. RHS state:

We all have a responsibility, as scientists and leaders. We have a responsibility and it is personal and we can never put it on our employer.

RHS continuously highlighted academic responsibility and assert that transparency of the use of resources are key aspects in societal accountability. To not just deliver research for the sake of delivery but rather to give something back to society as well as HKR. The practice of publication upon publication with little or no substance is referred to as “salami-slicing” and “quick-fix publications that anyone can do” by RHS. REE admitted to “being a part of the system” in terms of slicing. REE explained that sometimes it is a matter of being financed or not. Not, is often not an option. Nevertheless, REE decided to stop taking part in the nebulous world of academia where research without public value is premiered. REE is fed up with the pretentiousness of academia and proclaim that academics “must get of their high horse” and realise that:

I am a government employee costing tax-money and I have a responsibility and a mission to help society and not just build a resume like any other footballer.

REE continued and assert that “this is where academia went wrong”. He explained that a market need must be fulfilled with ones’ research for it to be useful. REE claimed that academia is lost in itself and state, similarly to RHS that “even a half-wit can produce something mediocre and subsequently attend a conference”. Noticeably rallied up, REE lowered his voice and explained that:

Building an academic resume is like putting ornaments in a Christmas tree. It says absolutely nothing about the tree. It is just a bunch of ornaments.

THS highlighted that whether academics can produce a lot of research or not depends on the field of research. Nevertheless, REE called for more quantitative measures as it “would be more fair”. TEE similarly thinks quantitative measurements are more fair because of the lack of outside experts. REE and TEE continued their argument saying that collegial evaluation within the institution is not without problems. REE explained that no one knows or understands what he is doing. It is too complex and this is a disfavour when it comes to grants, research means and evaluation. TEE similarly noted that the research field he is active in is so narrow that no one at HKR can hold him accountable. No one knows what he is doing or why. TEE sighed

when discussing the topic and witters “I don’t even think they can tell a good journal from a bad journal. They have no idea”. Nevertheless, both academics strong in teaching called for more precise, qualitative and thus subjective measuring as it is virtually impossible to evaluate teaching skills with quantitative objective measurements. TEE’s did however highlight that the lack of competence to evaluate him is “frustrating”. Yet, TEE understands that outside experts are too expensive to hire and said “I do see a point in the use of quantitative measures”. High-tech measuring systems such as fitting students with electronical devices and eye-tracking during lectures to evaluate teaching performance is desirable but TEE realises that it is too expensive to be feasible.

In more recent years’ pedagogical expertise and performance has been on the rise in status at HKR. The vice-chancellor is responsible according to THS. THS and TEE both appreciates that the teaching capabilities have been given somewhat equal weight as research when evaluating performance. As THS expressed it, “it is a matter of explaining and reasoning around silent professional competence”. Thus, it is a qualitative measurement that must be done by peers. Nevertheless, RHS pointed out that qualitative numbers such as number of publications and the journal ranking are generally used as a “rule of thumb” when evaluating performance in academia. THS stated that “what you measure is what you get” and TEE despondently said that “you measure the things you can measure because you are no measuring expert. And then you complain about the measuring”. The vice-chancellors focus on pedagogical skills and strategy to direct funds towards groups of academics in certain fields is coherent with the outspoken strategy of connecting research to bachelor level programmes and too premier the academics with a weak research tradition and a large body of students. According to THS, the vice-chancellor has “made it very clear what is important and not important”. All academics explicitly asserted that the vice-chancellor has a long uphill battle with the internal groups he inherited when he assumed his position as vice-chancellor. The academic resistance is strong in terms of retaining “the old structured” and the “old ways” as REE expressed it. REE is in favour of removing the “old ways” as it ultimately resulted in “the one that shouts the loudest, get the most”. Nevertheless, REE displayed a strong disdain for the directing of fund and TEE were noticeably upset and angered when discussing the implications of directing and premiering funds to a certain group and said “perhaps they are marginalized for a reason”. He elaborated and asserted that mechanisms intended to restrict individual development in favour of a specific groups could jeopardize the quality of the whole institution. The emotionally fuelled response was quickly haltered with a chuckle and the statement “haha, you really got me going there!”.

The academics of HKR are aware of what the information they produce is used for. For example, THS explained, in detail, how the head of department where she works utilizes the information to estimate the quality of courses, i.e. what to refine and what to replace. THS did however highlight that the case is different in some areas of HKR where traditions run deep:

It is not so easy to change people or their traditions.

The other academics have a similar story where they are aware or somewhat aware of why they need to submit performance information. The two academics of the School of Education and Environment active in narrow fields explained that they produce information in order to receive funding but the people that they send the information to is often unable to understand the information. RHS agree and described a situation where the financiers just want confirmation that there is some action and production. All four academics agree that the objective quantitative information is non-representative of their performance. For example, TEE and THS explained that objective measurements such as the course evaluation is merely an indicator and not a measurement of one's performance. The real signs of performance are measured during the lectures where TEE scout for signs, "it can be very small signs. Their eyes during a lecture for example." And explains that this indicates that a student has lost his/hers footing and need redirecting or that the speed needs to be adjusted. THS utilizes the students as gauges of performance during lectures in a similar fashion where students are urged to participate in a short reflection paper stating positive and negative aspects of the lecture. Eloquently put by THS:

I can still see a tendency. Are there many students expressing concerns about stress?! Then I have to think about why. Maybe it is an indicator that the module with teacher X worked very well but the module with teacher Y, whom they adore, did not add to the discussion. Good, now we know! I would never have been able to receive the feedback because the students would most likely fear repercussions from the academic.

The results are, per THS, that the students anchor the lecture and she receives feedback. THS importantly noted that it is only an indication and must not become a "pleasure-index" where students act as discontent consumers. TEE concur and proclaim that the goal of a course can never be to produce an exam that all students pass and thus leave without complaining. Course evaluations are merely an indication of performance used by TEE and THS to improve their courses and their own performance as teachers. THS highlighted that commitment to the students is key in delivering high-quality teaching:

(The course evaluation) measures whether it has been a waste of time. /.../ somehow measures the teacher's commitment to the students. That you have had some form of communication. /.../ for me, it measures how well I have performed. Is this course delivering what is said it would? Any failures? Have we understood each other (student and the teacher)? Have we played on the same playing field?

Furthermore, feedback from students have been used by THS to improve the performance of fellow colleagues by means of explaining what went wrong and how to improve. The criticism were received with gratitude rather than defence mechanisms. Similarly to TEE and THS, RHS use performance information to improve her research and her fellow colleagues. REE is seemingly more market-oriented claiming that performance information is used as a means to improve the product or service delivered to the customer and thus society. Furthermore, REE use the performance information to defend his work and existence if someone should ask. He did however note that this could be connected to the fact that no one really understands his research but "everyone understands finances. Everybody understands hard numbers". The comparison to potential partners in cooperation are possible uses for performance information. THS explained: "pedagogical accreditation is an indicator of competence and commitment" suggesting that the potential partner's commitment is gauged in order to evaluate whether the cooperation will be on equal grounds in terms of commitment and thus fruitful. TEE elaborated and explained that it feels safer to cooperate with someone of a higher academic title.

The performance information is used as a base for decisions by all four academics. The choices made to improve on an organizational and individual level means that the choices must be argued for as the academics essentially consume tax-money. Appropriately put by TEE:

This is not strange. We consume a lot of resources. We are like a company where we produce...we produce knowledge! We must justify our production.

In sum, the academics are fairly content with the performance measurements systems currently used at HKR. REE and TEE want more performance measuring and TEE assert that he "likes the idea of performance-based measuring, that you have to do something to get something". REE expressed similar thoughts when discussing performance-based measuring and its implications on academic performance:

I don't mind people not doing anything. But they should not be paid to do so.

RHS is content with the current system and THS were somewhat diplomatic and stated that both qualitative and quantitative measures are needed and that the performance measurements

are a mere indication and not an actual representation of performance. The academics see room for improvement but nevertheless realises that it is not a perfect system but it is the best system available when factoring in time and cost.

### **5.3 Students**

The students were adamant that academic performance must be measured. SHS speculated that academics in Sweden are under less stress than Anglo-Saxon academics because we do not hold them accountable for their actions to the same degree. He argued that the private funding increase the focus on accountability and Swedes do not realise that they are paying for their education since it is included in the income-based tax. WHS did however point out that it is impossible to evaluate academic performance as students lack the competence and thus ability to do so. SHS concur and state that “it is a balance act. What is a good researcher?” and discusses the fact that it is possible to produce articles that “marginally change the field”. The students from the School of Education and Environment both feel that students must rely on the information available. According to WEE the situation is not optimal but nevertheless unavoidable and depressingly state:

How else are you going to compare two teachers when you do not know them?!.../.../ because you have nothing else too...How else are you going to measure them? It not like you can just go talk to them!

Academic performance is difficult to explain according to the students. Yet, WHS produced an answer worth reproducing. He stated that:

A good academic. A learned person who does not...that does not turn their opinion with the tide. Someone who does not care about the news because he knows! Understands what is behind the scenes.../.../...that you understand contexts. How everything is connected, not just the obvious and shallow but deeper.

The academic’s ability as a researcher cannot be evaluated properly per the students but the academic’s effort is noted. SHS highlighted that “it is a sign of drive and credibility“. WEE similarly stated that an academic title must mean that the person is truly interested in the topic as they pursuit a career in academia which requires the delving into a subject matter over a great length of time. The level of experience can be gauged with the help of a title but it is not important for the students. WHS forcefully stated that he does not care about research as:

Because it is not something that I can...that I personally, in the course, has any use or disuse of.../.../ what matters in the ability to teach.



All four students were concerned whether they “get something out of” the course and programme and explained that the teacher’s pedagogical skills are all that matters. WEE stated:

I prefer teachers that believe in themselves and are proficient at communicating and connect what they are talking about. Who does not just go through the power-point without the skills of arguing from the top of their head. That makes it so much more interesting.../.../ because I can read the power-point at home.

A high-performing academic is a person that can synthesise and “unlock” subject matters through their explaining and motivation of students according to WHS and WEE. WHS and WEE both feel that academics must engage and be in high spirits when teaching. If the academic loses attention he/she must recapture it. WEE explain that some teachers “are merely there for the cash.” and WHS alarmingly stated that some academics “look down on the student as lazy and not interested”. The connection between academic and students are seen as a key in the exchange of information. According to SHS academics only provide the lecture with 60% of the energy and that the rest must come from the students themselves. Beyond engagement and commitment to the students, SHS uphold the notion of theoretical and practical academics. He explained that theoretically strong academics convey an image of being up-to-date in the world of science and research and an academic with practical experience provides weight to arguments as he/she have “real life experience”. Yet these types of performance information cannot be used as a predictor of academics’ level of performance and all students reproduced examples of academics that should have been great teachers based on credentials but was not. SEE persuasively stated:

I would rather have a teacher who know less but can convey it than a teacher who know a lot but cannot convey it. Because I have no use for that person.

The students highlighted that the only way they can contribute to the discussion about academic performance is to attend the course and then complete the course evaluations. The students disdain courses without any obvious purpose as they are expecting information useful either in subsequent courses or in their future career. WEE were especially persuasive of the importance of practical application of theory in order to make it interesting. It solidifies the information and the most efficient way of accomplishing this as an academic is per WEE:

Tell a story. That is also important! Story-telling. That makes it easier for listen, to understand. It becomes interesting. Instead of just ploughing through theory. Because that puts you to sleep!

WEE continued:

Otherwise it is just something we do to get credits. That is a waste of time.

Nonetheless, SHS pointed out that the practical connection is important as most of the students attending class will subsequently go into the labour market unlike himself who intends to continue his education on an advanced level. WHS were obviously emotionally invested in subject matter as he frustrated explained that the academics:

Must understand that most of the student are present only to pass the course.  
They do not give shit if they learn anything...which is sad but nevertheless,  
there has to be an understanding.

The students noted that a valuable course is a course where the information is presented in a comprehensible way, in a moderate speed to accompany most of the class's level and connects to the practical world. WHS explained that humility and the ability to step outside of the pre-planned realm of information and improvise is key. WEE and SEE concur. However, SEE accentuated that it is only a mere indication because students are unable to evaluate the content. "You can't tell until you are out on the job" as SEE put it. Nevertheless, all four students think that the course evaluation is important to complete as it is a way for the academic to improve the content and their own performance. In addition, WHS noted that this means an improvement for the students' environment and should therefore be in their best interest to complete the course evaluation. The students easily provided examples of things that have changed for the better upon request. SEE was adamant saying that he knew for a fact that things have changed because:

There was a course that was fairly new. And when we took it...it was new.  
And they changed the course for the next generation in accordance with our  
course evaluation.

The students could however also provide examples of courses and consequently academics that refuse to evolve. SHS even provided an example of a course and academic that he feared in an alarming manner. SHS explained that he did not complete the course evaluation despite clear problems because he feared that the academic could deduce who had written the comments with the consequence that his grades would be effected. SHS also referred to a friend who completed a course evaluation in broken Swedish to avoid reprisals. WEE provided an example of similar calibre as he explained:

We have this one teacher. Nobody likes him. And I mean everybody throughout all years of the programme. I have not met one single person that like the teacher...and we have complained to the people in charge. And other teachers! We really want him to leave! But it does not seem as if he is leaving...maybe there is a short supply of teachers in subject or maybe HKR does not have the money to employ a proper teacher to replace him.

WEE continued and explained that other programmes have the same teacher and they also dislike him. WEE subsequently stated that it feels like it is pointless to complete the evaluations if nothing happens. He did however stay somewhat positive as he hoped that the academic will see the feedback as valuable. SHS felt the same way:

I mean, I see a value in the completion of the course evaluation and I hope the teachers see the same. Because I mean. It is about our education, and your programme. Or everybody...all of it. You are dependent on the constant flow of students and thus your reputation...so I...I complete them because I hope that people will use the information.

When asked why he was so optimistic and hopeful, an ambivalent answer followed:

Because I think: this is a grown person working in academia and should thus be able to utilize factual critique. But some people just can't.

WHS convey a similar reality and proclaimed that he is convinced that the people unable to level with the students, to commit and to be humble are the ones unable to utilize critique. He talked about pride among academics as a negative thing that ultimately means that "they don't have the humility that actually makes you appreciate someone". However, despite the frustration WHS, SHS and WEE associated with the course evaluation the students believe in the tool. However, they did highlight that it is not an accurate measurement of academic performance. WHS provided the most colourful quote as he said:

No, not really. Because it is just a scale where you put dots. And it is the same questions for all courses...somehow it becomes comparable...but...but...it kind of becomes... unreasonable due to the different nature of courses. It is not reasonable that a course in commercial law, a course that I don't think can take to many forms. And that is that. Fixed!...compared to a course that is new with a few modules, seminars and presentations and such. It is very wrong to assess the courses using the same measures. Because in the new course with a lite more flow. There a several parts. Are you supposed too point an average score for all parts?! What if you really liked something and dislikes something

else...I mean there is a box at the end where you can write. And I guess you do but only as much as...but...but...it is not really comparable!

However, he did accentuate that the course evaluation can work as:

A sort of whistle-blower to indicate that the course is way of track.

The information used by students comes in forms such as UKÄ evaluations, academic teaching capability and the word of mouth between students around campus. UKÄ's information is mostly used as curiosa because of the bounded rationality of students. They are simply unaware of where to find the information and even if they knew where to find it they would not know how to use it. SHS explained that he was lost after upper-secondary school with an ambiguous life-goal and therefore the information would be useless to him. He spelled it out clearly stating that "it was not relevant to search for what is good and what is bad...but now I definitely see a value". SHS and WHS both agree that formal ranking or evaluation is relevant if you have the grades for it. WHS, WEE and SHS have looked at other schools in awe but always thought that the required grade-point average to successfully apply is too high with the consequence that school or programme performance is irrelevant. WHS claimed that HKRs ranking based on UKÄ evaluations were a small piece of the puzzle that ultimately guided him towards HKR. He believes that personal preferences are almighty. Location, costs for housing, family and friends, party opportunities combined with things such as full or part time course speed, spring or autumn if you are looking for a specific course etcetera. The performance information is only used to choose schools and programs given superior upper-secondary grades. WHS reflected and speculated that the performance information is a mere indication as "even if the overall quality is good. It does not say much about what is actually happens". SEE and SHS both explained that the value for the future in terms of skills and job opportunities are more important than high prestige and a good ranking. Nonetheless, UKÄ's evaluation is a source of pride. As SHS enthusiastically explained:

I would say that it is some form of pride or joy that "well, this is a good education". I would say that!

Furthermore, the information is used to get rid of personal insecurities about one's own knowledge and ability in the workforce. SHS stated that the thought of his own incapacity compared to someone that have completed a similar programme at a different school haunted him. In short:

Hopefully this UKÄ evaluation speaks that I know at least as much as they do.

SHS continued and said that “in a sense it calms my nerves” and connects the validation of his own knowledge to a sense of self-fulfilment.

All four students use the the information to gauge the effort needed to pass or to excel in the course rather than to evaluate the performance or capabilities of an academic per se. “It allows for mental preparation for an intense course. To pay extra attention and ask more questions” as SEE put it. The expectations of the courses are also gauged with the help of performance information. SHS state that a theoretical experienced academic or an academic with practical experience most definitely raises the expectations despite that he knows that the information must not be representative of the substance they receive during lectures. Nevertheless, the expectations are set in order to accommodate the own self-fulfilment and the level of engagement. SHS said:

I want something from the course. I want...I want...I want to leave the course  
with more knowledge than I had coming into the course.

Moreover, SEE decides whether to buy the course literature based on performance information delivered by HKR in the form of syllabus and the word of mouth by students. WEE have the same strategy for saving money as course literature is expensive and does not always aid the understanding of the course subject matter. Furthermore, WHS use the information to measure the level of commitment and presence needed to pass as he works part-time. In other words, the information is an indication of how much he can work and still pass the course.

#### **5.4 Summary and model**

The managers use performance information to improve organizational performance by evaluating course and programme performance and allocating resources in terms of discharging academics, setting academics’ salary and the discontinuing of courses and programmes. In addition, the managers use performance information as a tool to aid the academics in their personal development by evaluating their performance and resolving conflicts within the organization. Lastly, the managers use performance information to steer the organization in the desired direction (e.g. focus on quality-improvement). In short, the managers use performance information to improve course- and programme-quality by evaluating course performance and subsequently allocating resources.

The academics use performance information to evaluate course and programme performance in terms of their teaching skills and the educational substance provided. Furthermore, performance information is used to improve the performance of colleagues. Lastly, the

academics use performance information to assess potential research partners and to vindicate one’s existence and use of resources. In short, the academics use performance information to defend themselves against critics, gauge potential partners and as a means of personal and organizational improvement.

The students use performance information to gauge future values such as obtained skills and job opportunities by evaluating course- and programme-quality ultimately soothing personal insecurities. In addition, the students use performance information to adjust expectations by gauging the effort needed in the course, whether it is possible to work simultaneously and whether it is possible to save money by not purchasing the course literature. Lastly, the student use performance information as an ego boost and to help future students by trying to improve course-quality. In short, the students use performance information to improve course-quality, mitigate uncertainty and to evaluate where to get the best educational service.

An overview of managers, academics and students use of performance information is illustrated in the model below.

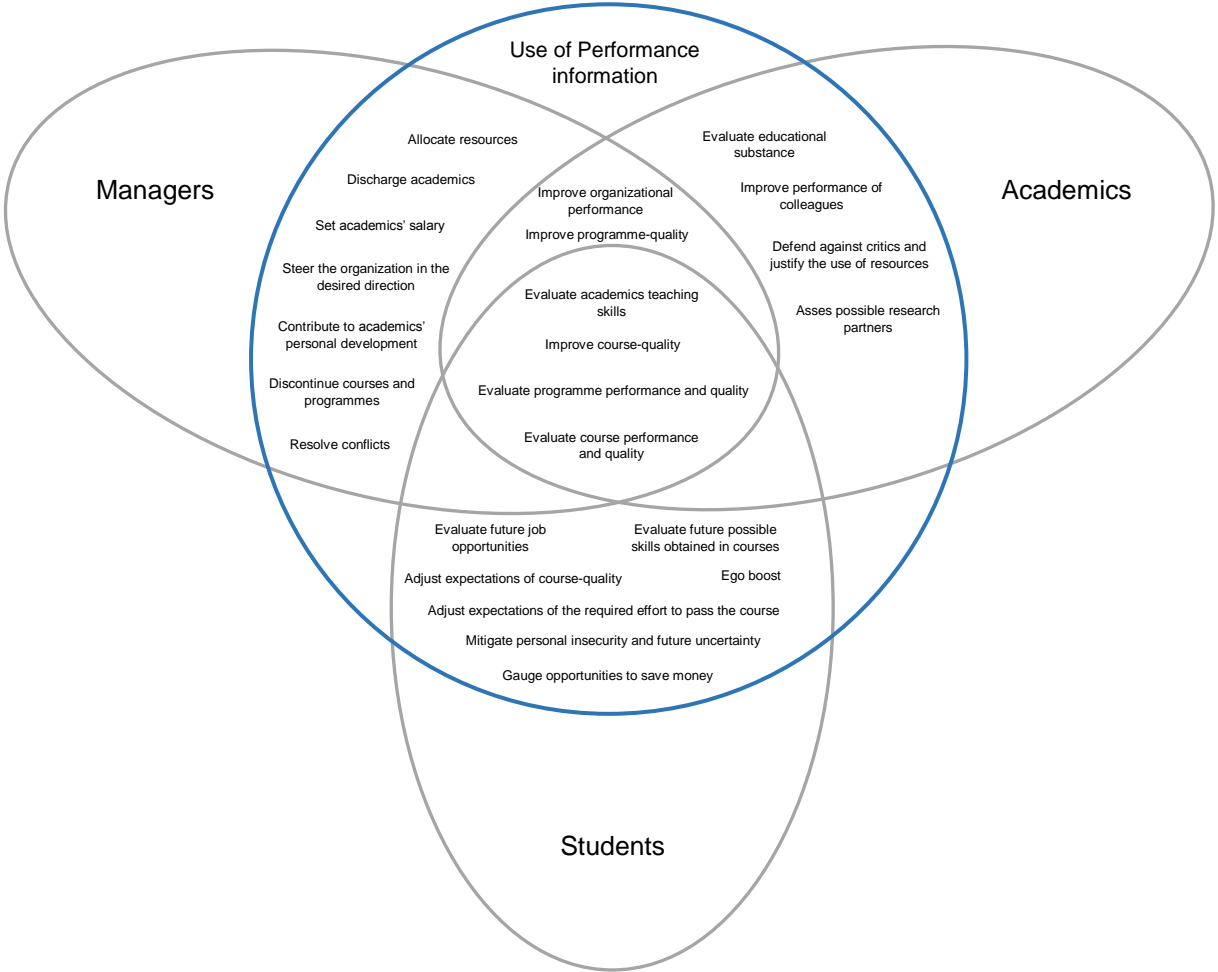


Figure 5.1 – How managers, academics and students use performance information

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## 6. Discussion and conclusions

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The university sector is undoubtedly an institutional environment as the managers explained that the letter of appropriation is almighty at universities. Furthermore, knowledge transfer through mimetic and coercive action within the institution ultimately creates the norm (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In other words, the setting of HKR anchors the notion of an institutional context.

Vakkuri and Meklin (2003) and Vakkuri (2010) explain that the measuring and the use of performance measurements are ambiguous. Yet, the 12 respondents in this study mediated a different reality. The students were aware of why academics were measured and how they were measured. Similarly, the academics and managers showed no signs of decision-making under conditions of ambiguity in their everyday work. March (1978) argues that ambiguous conditions means that goals are vague, problematic, inconsistent and unstable. The respondents did not show signs of ambiguity in the term of March (1978) definition of ambiguity as the assertive answers constituted that the academics must be held accountable as they are consuming tax-money and the purpose of the current system of measuring performance is to promote change and development. In other words, to improve the organization and the individuals within the organization.

The managerial discretion of the vice-chancellor mediated by the academics ought to be proof that his influence, firm control and focus on quality leaves no questions or room for individual interpretation and thus no ambiguity. Further proof ought to be the academics that resigned from the research board in protest to the vice-chancellor's determination in decision-making, the academic stating that the vice-chancellor "made it very clear what is important and not important" and the fact that a poor performance in a course evaluation results in questions down the hierarchy. Yet, some academics stand strong and refuse to follow the stream as it is seen as a violation of their academic freedom. The resistance can be displayed differently by different actors in different fields (Kallio et al., 2015) but can nevertheless be seen as academic logic refusing to surrender to the dominance of managerial logic (Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011). However, the vice-chancellor stated that academics know that they are being watched and controlled and must therefore act accordingly.

The identification of ambiguity is arguably ambiguous (Etner et al. 2012) in an environment where there are several institutional logics. Nevertheless, the performance measuring and the use of the performance information might be interpreted as non-ambiguous as the respondents'

logic constituted a clear meaning (i.e. no ambiguity). For example, the academic that prescribe to academic logic and sees his/her mission divided in three parts, research, teaching and affecting the public debate might conceptualize and interpret the measuring and use of information as something done and used to improve individual performance. This is perfectly rational for the academic while the manager could see the measuring and use of information as something to improve the quality of the course and not the individual academic per se. Little do they know that the output is the same as the common goal is individual improvement and the joint desired outcome is a high-quality educational service. This is in line with Reay and Hinings (2009) and Pettersen (2015) claim that two or more logics can co-exist and thrive if there is a common goal or joint desired outcome.

The governmental authority UKÄ are responsible for the performance measuring in the university sector yet provides little or no guidelines to what constitutes high quality. In other words, it is up to the universities themselves to figure it out according to the managers. Thus, in line with Caspersen et al. (2017) use of the word ambiguity as an "openness for different interpretations". Consequently, actions become rational as the bounded rationality (human constraint) limits the actor and thus force decisions based on institutional logic (March, 1978). The managerial discretion implied is nevertheless created with the help of ambiguity (Yang, 2016). In other words, the creation of ambiguity can arguably be seen as a paradoxical event because of the "openness for different interpretations". Clear goals and values are politically sensitive (Modell, 2003) yet it creates room for one institutional logic to be dominant through an increase in managerial discretion with the consequence of reduced ambiguity. Nevertheless, the managerial discretion is utilized to increase quality and to promote individual improvement at HKR. The actors within HKR join forces in the co-creation of value that the vice-chancellors envision as high quality. It is a matter of co-operation and coordination as two respondents expressed it. Thus, working towards processes, methods and practices that could be considered high quality by UKÄ.

The different institutional logics are evident when discussing whether to use quantitative or qualitative measurements to measure performance. The managers use a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures but focus on quantitative measures as they are the most accessible and simplest to use when deciding how to allocate resources. Thus, showing signs of managerial logic. The academics wanted "better measurements" and some cried out for expert groups while simultaneously propagating quantitative measures as they are the most "fair". The variation can potentially be explained by the fact that the academic belong to



different fields and thus different traditions (Pop-Vasileva et al., 2011; Kallio et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the sought-after measurements cohere with the academic logic. The students regard quantitative measures as useless and urge the use of qualitative measurements (e.g. complaints or feedback) as they see them as the best bet to cause change and improvement in the provided service. The characteristics of Ng and Forbes (2009) description of service logic is evident. Nevertheless, the small sample implies that generalization is foolish to consider as a valid possibility (Scapens, 2004).

The respondents measure performance and use performance information based on the ability to process the information. For example, students have the ability to *measure* academic performance and subsequently fill out the course evaluation but they do not have the ability to *evaluate* academic performance or educational substance. The play on words is highly important as it is easy to measure but difficult to evaluate. The academics asserted that the course evaluation should not be considered a “pleasure-index” as learning is the goal of a course and not happy students. The idea of students as consumers clash with the statement as service logic subscribers feel entitled to a service of adequate satisfaction by their standards (Ng & Forbes, 2009). The famous quote by Henry Ford, “If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses”, comes to mind. In other words, the “customer feedback” is important but should not be almighty as the student’s perception of what is satisfying and thus a high-quality service can be problematic (Ng & Forbes, 2009). As one student explained, satisfaction in education could be the mitigation of personal insecurities (e.g. one’s own capability in the work force or level of knowledge). Yet, the academics and the managers stated that students can help contribute to individual and organizational improvements through the course evaluation despite not knowing what constitutes good academic performance or good educational substance. This implies that the contribution to an academic development and increased course-quality via course evaluations and the co-creation of value can be seen as genuine attempt to influence the service provided by the university. After all, the students want to “get something out of it” and not just “waste time” or “just get credits”. Thus, it is a sensible choice of action (March, 1978) based on service logic (Ng & Forbes, 2009) and not a symbolic use of the performance measurement (i.e. course evaluation).

The symbolic use of information is not uncommon as a consequence of conflicting institutional logics and conditions of ambiguity (Brignall & Modell, 2000; Vakkuri & Meklin, 2003; Modell & Wiesel, 2008; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Cheng, 2009; Dormer & Gill, 2010; Melo et al., 2010; Rautiainen & Järvenpää, 2012; Boitier & Rivière, 2013; Pettersen, 2015). Yet, HKR

shows no signs of obvious symbolic use as the vice-chancellor proves strong in decision-making. The academics supported the notion, to the best of my knowledge, independently from each other. The information seems to be used and not just symbolically produced, collected and shelved. In other words, the information is used as a base for decision and thus not useless (Lewis et al., 2007; Westergaard, 2014; Agyemang & Broadbent, 2015). However, it is not necessarily used to measure and compare performance. Boitier and Rivière (2013) argues that performance information must be put in a relationship to be useful but Melo et al. (2010) argues that the most important aspects is the action that follows the production and collection of performance information. Nonetheless, the action of changing course content, improving the provided goods or service, the allocation of resources and the evaluation of the preparation needed to pass a course speaks for itself. The managers, academics and students actively use the performance information as a decision basis. One could even argue that the performance information is used to influence the main academic evaluation aspects of research, teaching and administration (Cheng, 2009; Melo et al., 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012; Frost & Brockmann, 2014). The managers asserted that the academics must create value through exchanges of knowledge and practices regardless of their “academic freedom”. “Sometimes you just have to coordinate your practices” as the vice-chancellor put it. Moreover, the students create value as they apply, complete and comment on the courses with the conscious consumers right to demand a high-quality service in mind (Ng & Forbes, 2009). This means that the student is engaged and willing to take part in the education but also highly critical and thus prone to commenting or complaining depending on their experience of the course (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Consequently, providing an opportunity for the academics and the course-quality to improve. The course evaluations seem to be used in this fashion at HKR. In other words, managers, academics and students are working towards a common goal of joint desired outcome.

The performance measurement system of HKR is accompanied with a problem of genericness as it is a standard central document. Lewis et al. (2007) explain that a generic tool is too rigid meaning that is it difficult if not impossible to adapt to situational contexts. The managers provided their thoughts on the matter and concluded that the tool is problematic, “frustrating” and “confusing at times”. They sought after tools with more flexibility but nevertheless recognized that the system and tools are in place because it is the best available option. Similarly, the academics and students acclaimed and complained about the course evaluations because they are too generic. The tool provides little flexibility in terms of measuring different types of courses. In addition, the genericness means that it is difficult to measure actual

performance (Vakkuri, 2010; Pettersen, 2015). It is a mere indication of performance. This was acknowledged by all respondents. Two academics pointed to a problem mentioned by Vakkuri (2010) who explain that the tools are not objective even though they are standardized. The generic questions are unfit for different situational contexts and must thus be interpreted to the users' best ability. The result is that the user can use the tool as a mechanism of power. A prime example is the creation of a "please-index" where students could assert power as conscious consumers, in line with service logic, and thus signal managers that the course-quality and the academics teaching skills are insufficient. Consequently, the managers are faced with a choice of which institutional logic to prescribe to. The managerial logic value the quantification of past performances (information provided by students) and the academic logic value the options of personal growth and thus future value. In other words, managers must choose whether to listen to the students and discipline the academic to improve course-quality or listen to the academic and provide him/her with the resources to improve course-quality. However, as one academic stated, "hard numbers" are easier to utilize when defending one's use of resources. Nevertheless, the managers uphold the notion that both sides of the conflict must be considered in all situations. However, the statement can arguably be seen as image management as they are left without the protection of anonymity in this study (Alvesson, 2011).

The use of performance information at HKR follows the patterns of the institutional logics described by Kallio et al. (2010) and Ng and Forbes (2009) and discussed throughout the study. In sum, the managers use performance information as an indicator of past performance and subsequently set the salary of academics, discipline academics and allocate resources. The academics use performance information as an indication of educational and research performance and accordingly as a way of improving future organizational- and individual performance. The students use performance information as an indicator of where to get the best service. In other words, the performance information is used in a similar fashion (i.e. as an indication of performance) but for different reasons. Thus, anchoring March (1978) claim that actors use information in a sensible manner based on logic and constraints. However, the described use should be seen with a cautious and critical eye as HKR employs 490 workers whereof 347 are academics and educate approximately 13 700 students (HKR, 2017a). The use of performance information described by the 12 respondents in this study is thus a mere indication and should by no means be seen as conclusive.

In conclusion, there are signs of co-existing institutional logics at HKR described as managerial logic, academic logic and service logic in the theoretical framework. The managers seem to

prescribe to managerial logic, the academics to managerial- and academic logic and the students to service logic. Furthermore, the study provides evidence for minor conflicts between managers and academics, and students and academics. The conflicts noted are the small group of academics that refuse to follow the stream claiming that it is a reduction of academic freedom and the reluctance from two respondents (academics) to see students as consumers.

There are few signs of ambiguity in the day-to-day operations of managers and academics. The vice-chancellor's high managerial discretion and thus his ideas of high-quality education reigns supreme with the consequence of reduced ambiguity. The observed ambiguity comes from the governmental authority of UKÄ as they fail to provide HKR with a clear indication of what constitutes high-quality education. However, the lack allows for the managerial discretion that ultimately reduces ambiguity. The students showed no signs of ambiguity in the measuring of performance or the use of performance information.

The performance measurements are not used to measure actual performance but rather as an indication of performance. The measurements are not representative of performance. However, the performance measurements are not useless. The managers use performance information to evaluate course performance and subsequently allocate resources. The objective is to improve course- and programme-quality. In addition, the managers use performance information as a mechanism to steer the organization in the desired direction of the vice-chancellor and his ideas of high-quality education. The academics use performance information as a defence against critics and as a means of personal and organizational improvement. Potential research partners are also evaluated with the use of performance information. The students use performance information to evaluate where to get the best educational service by gauging the performance of universities. In addition, the student use performance information to improve course-quality for future students and to mitigate personal insecurities and future uncertainty. In other words, the performance information is used as an individual and organizational learning tool by the managers, academics and students with the common goal of improving individual performance and course-quality.

A suggestion for the improvement of course evaluations could be to create additional standardized questionnaires for different types of courses. For example, one questionnaire for part-time distance courses, one for courses with one large examination, one for courses with two smaller examinations and one for courses with several examinations of different nature.

The theoretical framework of this study can be utilized to explore the use of performance information at any university in Sweden. Future studies could include additional respondents and compare the results to this study or compare different actors' use of performance information. Furthermore, future studies could also compare how performance information is used at different universities or potentially use quantitative or mixed methods to collect the data in order to further develop the topic.

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## Appendix 1 – Interview guide – academics and managers

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- Please, introduce yourself.
  - Title, years of experience etc.
- How long have you been working at HKR?
  - Pre/post 2008 and the reform?
  - Are you satisfied with your current job/work situation?
    - Why/why not?
  - Have you noticed any changes in regards to the new leadership of Håkan Pihl?
    - What are your thoughts?
    - Positive or negative experience?
      - Can you provide an example?
- Do you encounter performance measurement systems in your day-to-day work?
  - What are your thoughts on the systems?
  - What are your thoughts on performance in academia?
    - Can you please elaborate?
      - What do you consider performance/quality in teaching and research?
  - Have you noticed any changes in the way performance is measured in academia during your career?
    - Can you please elaborate and provide an example?
- Do you ever measure performance in research or teaching?
  - If yes - What kind of measurements do you use?
    - Who chose them?
    - What are your thoughts on the representativeness of the measurements in regards to the individual's performance?
    - Do you think it is reasonable that you measure the performance?
      - Why/why not?
        - Can you please elaborate?
    - Do you consider the measuring as a part of the academic work or something management require?
      - If mandatory – would you still do it if it was voluntary?

- If part of the job – natural part of the job or more of a nuisance that must be done?
    - What kind of information are you obliged to submit?
      - Do you think it is reasonable?
        - Why/why not?
- Who evaluates your performance?
  - Why?
  - Do you feel comfortable with the person?
  - Do you feel comfortable with the approach to performance measurements?
    - Why/why not?
  - Do you think it is reasonable?
    - Why/why not?
  - Do you know why your performance is evaluated?
    - Can you please elaborate?
  - Do you know how the information is used?
    - Can you please elaborate?
      - How do you know that? / why don't you know that?
  - Do you think the measurements are representative of your annual performance?
- How do you use the available performance information? (E.g. student surveys, citations, publications in high quality journals etc.)
  - What is the “use-value” for you?
    - Can you please elaborate and provide examples?
  - Have you ever used performance information as a base for decisions?
    - Why/why not?
    - Can you provide examples?
  - What are your thoughts on the available performance information?
    - Is it representative of the academic performance?
      - Why/why not?
        - Can you please elaborate?

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## Appendix 2 – Interview guide - students

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- Please, introduce yourself.
  - Title, years of experience etc.
- Do you encounter performance measurement systems in your day-to-day work?
  - What are your thoughts on the systems?
  - What are your thoughts on performance in academia?
    - Can you please elaborate?
      - What do you consider performance/quality in teaching and research?
- Do you ever measure the academics performance in research or teaching?
  - If yes - What kind of measurements do you use?
    - Who chose them?
    - What are your thoughts on the representativeness of the measurements in regards to the individual's performance?
    - Do you think it is reasonable that you measure the performance?
      - Why/why not?
        - Can you please elaborate?
  - What kind of information are you obliged to submit? (e.g. course evaluations)
    - Do you think it is reasonable?
      - Why/why not?
    - Do you know why you are doing it?
      - Your own choice or coercive choice?
      - Are you honest while doing it?
- Do you know why academic performance is evaluated?
  - Do you feel comfortable with the approach to performance measurements?
    - Why/why not?
  - Do you think it is reasonable?
    - Why/why not?
- Do you consider academic titles of experience when making decisions?
  - Do you consider the title being representative of the delivered performance?
  - Do you favour teaching credentials or practical credentials?

- How do you use the available performance information? (E.g. student surveys, citations, publications in high quality journals etc.)
  - What is the “use-value” for you?
    - Can you please elaborate and provide examples?
  - Have you ever used performance information as a base for decisions?
    - Why/why not?
    - Can you provide examples?
  - What are your thoughts on the available performance information?
    - Is it representative of the academic performance?
      - Why/why not?
        - Can you please elaborate?