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Clouder, D.L. , Oliver, M. and Tait, J.

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# **Embedding CETLs in a performance oriented culture in higher education: reflections on finding creative space**

Dr Lynn Clouder, Coventry University, Dr Martin Oliver, Institute of Education & Dr. Jo Tait, University of Surrey

## **Introduction**

There is currently much interest in creating more creative approaches to change in post-compulsory education. However, there is scant research which explores how creativity might be best fostered or enhanced in this context. This paper explores this gap with a study of two change initiatives within UK Higher Education institutions.

A competitive bidding process resulted in the creation, by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in April 2005, of seventy four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) in England ([www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/)). HEFCE's vision for CETLs was one of fostering creativity and innovation in higher education by providing substantial funding to 'recognize, celebrate and promote excellence'. HEFCE envisages CETLs as 'vibrant, dynamic entities .... engaging directly and purposively with student learning' and 'serving as a catalyst for change' (HEFCE, 2004, p.5). Given that we might expect CETLs to embody creativity they provide a useful case study to address the paucity of knowledge about how it might be inspired.

However, CETLs are not autonomous entities. They are context bound within institutions each with their own culture, traditions, priorities, reputations and discourses. There is a common imperative within higher education institutions to be entrepreneurial and engage more closely with business and the community (Barnett,

1994), which results in pressure to perform in new ways that means that universities are increasingly actively managed. Hence one of the most powerful and pervading of discourses is that of performativity with attendant concerns of productivity and accountability. At a glance, performativity might be considered to be held in a tension with creativity. It is this context of change, intended to be creative but carrying attendant concerns about accountability that will be explored and theorised in this paper.

## **Background**

### *Accountability and Performativity*

The introduction of new managerialism as a guiding principle for management in Higher Education has had a number of well-documented effects on the sector. The change to new public management and concerns for ‘quality’, ‘value for money’ and ‘public accountability’ has led to performance management, which is reliant on indicators such as performance targets and league tables, benchmarks and ‘best practice’ models (Keenoy, 2005). Established bureaucratic structures have been dismantled or at the least weakened, in favour of greater control by managers (Pollitt, 1990).

These developments have led to resistance and even resentment on the part of academics, not least because they are frequently associated with the negative Governmental discourses, instigated under Thatcher in the UK and inherited by Labour, arraigning ‘arrogant’ professionals, ‘inflexible’ bureaucrats and ‘interfering’ local politicians (Newman & Clark, 1994). Within this context, some academics having become ‘managed professionals’ (Rhoades, 1997).

It is worth highlighting one consequence of this. Cowen (1996) argues that the measurement of performance has resulted in a shift from a collegial to a management culture, affecting the way in which academic staff work and leading to withdrawal from community responsibilities as a result of the individualising tendencies of performativity. Inevitable consequences include heightened competitiveness, less transparency about how time is spent, increased isolation and acceptance of surveillance.

There is also serious concern that the mechanisms developed for monitoring academic work are over-simplistic. Monitoring, such as quality assurance, is often advocated on the grounds that ‘what gets measured gets done’; it can easily be challenged by the corollary, that what does not get measured then gets neglected (Blalock, 1999). In the complex world of education, where the best ways to measure ‘learning’, ‘education’ and so on remain highly contested, it is unlikely that any simple system of measurement will be popular, especially when the consequences of failing to meet targets can include loss of income or public criticism. Although Cowen (1996) highlights the significance of visible performativity in the management of academic labour in the university context, the term is more usually associated with medium and large ‘for profit’ businesses (Deem, 1998). According to Lyotard (1984, p. xxiv), performativity is the discourse of business and management devoted to ‘optimizing the system’s performance - efficiency’. He highlights the emphasis on ‘product’ and measures of ‘productivity’. Structurally, performativity is predicated on a belief in apparently objective systems of accountability and measurement, rather than in the subjective judgement and specialized knowledges of individuals (Lyotard, 1984). Barnett *et al* (2001, p. 436) associate the ‘performative shift’ with efficiency, outputs and ‘use value’, which they suggest imply ‘doing rather than knowing, and

performance, rather than understanding'. Trust and respect, once automatically accorded to the professional, now has to be earned through their ability to perform to an externally given set of performance indicators (Dent & Whitehead, 2001). The right to manage continues to grow. With the decision of HEFCE to link resources to the production of learning and teaching strategies, the choice of pedagogy has increasingly become a matter of institutional strategy rather than personal, professional judgement (Holley & Oliver 2000).

Accountability and performativity are not usually conducive to risk taking or creative problem solving (Gleeson & Husband, 2001), because they are frequently associated with a 'blame culture' (Avis, 2005). In fact, Avis argues that performativity stifles innovation, encouraging deeply conservative practices. Such 'culturization' inhibits consideration of anything outside of the confines of cultural acceptances (Pearce, 1974, p.49). Similarly, Winter *et al* (2000, p. 292) blame 'stifled learning and creativity' on managerialism, which they associate with low levels of commitment among academics. This stands in contrast to the vision of collegiality offered by Hudec (2006: 18):

Collegiality optimizes resources and enables people to work in a respectful environment in which each person is able to make a contribution to the organization's good in an open, honest atmosphere that encourages and supports informed different views and opinions.... How the organization addresses creative ideas and different viewpoints will greatly influence the flow of insights and knowledge. Its benefits include improved productivity due to improved morale, increased innovation and insight into product and service, willingness to accept and support change through participation.

HEFCE's recent decision to fund CETLs is interesting in this context. Keenoy (2005) highlights that performance measurement has generated metaphors such as 'quality', 'value for money' and 'public accountability' that valorise the need for performance targets and indicators, league tables and 'best practice models'. The discourse is evident in the stage two competitive bid for CETL status submitted by CIPeL, in which one of the stated aims is to become a 'beacon of best practice'. On the one hand, then, CETLs represent a continued opportunity for control, in that they have sanctioned particular kinds of pedagogic work (largely determined by institutional strategy) through the allocation of earmarked funding. On the other, however, the initiative has an explicit agenda for building understanding rather than purely for implementation (HEFCE, 2004). It is this possibility that serves as a point of departure for the study described here.

### *Creativity*

In the context of the contemporary discourse one might question the extent to which creativity is valued with respect to academic endeavour when juxtaposed with competing forms of 'outputs'. Conceptions of what creativity means are diverse; however, there are commonalities. Gruber and Wallace's (1999, p. 94) definition suggests, 'the product must be new and must be given value according to some external criteria.' Boden (1999) also refers to the generation of ideas that are both novel and valuable and Knight (2002, p. 1) to the construction of 'new tools and new outcomes – new embodiments of knowledge'. These definitions of creativity were developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s therefore possibly not surprisingly, they echo the prevailing discourse of the time, such as the 'use value', productivity and 'doing' with which academics have become familiar. Research by Edwards et al

(2006) suggests that creativity is still associated with these characteristics usually expressed through a product that ‘works’ in some way. However, Jackson (2006, p.8) alludes to a definition developed by Dellas and Gaier in 1970 that suggests that characteristics of ‘imagination, insight and intellect, as well as feeling and emotion’ are necessary to develop and take ideas forward.

The contrast between the latter conception of creativity and the more outcome focused ‘definitions’ seems to highlight a binary between the imaginative, intuitive and affective side of creativity and the techno-rational productivity based conception. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) reinforces the essential nature of this binary:

‘Curiosity and drive are the yin and the yang that need to be combined in order to achieve something new’ ... the first requires openness to outside stimuli, the second inner focus; the first deals with ideas and objects for their own sake, the second is competitive and achievement oriented. Both are required for creativity to become actualized’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 185)

The circumstances for actualization are bound to be complex; however, Tosey (2006, p. 30) suggests that we can generate the conditions in which it can flourish even given ‘tensions in practice towards efficiency, certainty and conformity’. He argues that from a complexity perspective, constraints such as those just mentioned in fact enhance ‘emergence’, which is the process by which processes or structures come into being. Constraints are reassuring in a way because they limit possibilities and therefore potentially enable creativity. Tosey refers to ‘good constraints’ such as learning outcome frameworks, programme specifications and mechanisms such as the use of learning contracts, which can be interpreted and used creatively to enhance

student learning and creativity. Developing these ideas we might see how performative constraints manifest in development and performance reviews and applied research strategies might serve as good constraints if interpreted and used to unleash creative potential in academic staff. Tosey (2006) also counters the commonly held conception that creativity is an individual attribute (Sternberg & Lubart, 1993). He argues that it is social and collaborative on the grounds that ‘connections and relations in which individuals are fully engaged are vital if dreams and mistakes are to become manifest as new forms’ (Tosey, 2006, p. 30). Such engagement resonates with the notion of immersion deemed necessary by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) who suggests that creative people thrive on and need to express themselves through creative projects. He highlights the need to find out what people are passionate about and then to help them immerse themselves in it (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). The extent to which secondment and fellowship schemes allow such immersion provides a focus for the discussion to follow.

### **The Influence of Context**

CETLs are concerned with strengthening the strategic focus on teaching and learning by rewarding excellent teaching practice. The suggestion that CETLs will promote a ‘scholarly-based and forward-looking approach to teaching and learning’ (HEFCE, 2004, p.3) assumes a strong relationship between teaching, learning, scholarship and research, which is reflected in research and evaluation activity within the CETL initiatives.

CETLs are predicated on an embedded theory of change focusing on the propositions of reward and recognition, excellent teaching produces excellent learning and recognition of excellence in teaching and learning promotes excellence across the

sector (Saunders et al, 2007). However, the programme is not prescriptive, adopting instead what Saunders et al (2007, p. 8) refer to as the ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’ approach. This provides scope for experimentation and innovation across all of the main subject areas (HEFCE, 2005), and illustrates the belief that we may ‘provide suitable conditions and trust change will come’ (Saunders et al, 2007, p. 8).

The two CETLs that form the context for this study are the Centre for Interprofessional e-Learning (CIPeL) and the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTrE). As a collaborative CETL between Coventry and Sheffield Hallam Universities, CIPeL brings together two post-1992 institutions. Given the imperative for ‘new’ universities to enhance their research profile, performativity in the form of research targets is a priority in both institutions. At Coventry University, for example, the award of CETL status coincided closely with the launch of an Applied Research Strategy and a new Development and Performance Review process that was unequivocal about applied research targets for all academic staff.

The main aim of CIPeL is to find effective e-learning solutions to address the barriers to interprofessional learning in health and social care, ultimately leading to modernisation of health and social care services (DoH, 2000) and improved patient centred care. Balancing the different strands of CETL activity, such as supporting resource development, managing their archiving and dissemination, engaging in research and dissemination and nurturing collaborations is both challenging and invigorating.

SCEPTrE’s work focuses on understanding and improving student experiences of learning in professional workplace settings. This involves developing opportunities

for learning through enquiry-rich processes so that students are better prepared for learning in a complex world. The University of Surrey's professional training scheme has resulted in an outstanding student employment profile.

In 2005, 96.1 per cent of our graduates entered employment or further study compared with the national average of 93.1 per cent. Between 1996 and 2005, Surrey had an average unemployment rate of just 2.1 per cent compared with the national average of 6.1 per cent.

(<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/undergraduate/experience/future/jobs/>

SCEPTrE's work seeks to enhance students' skills for enquiry and problem working in the workplace and develop new networks, as well as peer, tutor and employer support which contribute towards this.

There are similarities between the approaches the two CETLs have adopted in order to achieve these aims. In line with HEFCE's vision of stimulating further excellent practice informed by 'scholarly reflection' and 'adventurous thinking', CIPeL and SCEPTrE provide academics with the opportunity for professional development through staff 'secondments' and 'fellowships' respectively.

The secondment scheme within CIPeL focuses on the production of e-learning resources promoting interprofessional learning. Staff applying for a secondment can request a maximum of 75 days release to develop, build and evaluate an e-learning resource of their own choice. Secondments are open to individuals and small teams, and are supported by instructional designers, learning technologists and a mentor from within the core team. As CIPeL 'associates' they become part of a community, which provides peer review, support and stimulation. In addition to CIPeL funding

replacement costs, on completion of the secondment the individual staff member and their Subject Group receive a small financial reward. Further funds are available to enable secondees to disseminate their work. 22 secondments have been completed, six are in process and a further thirteen are at varied stages of the application process across both sites. Secondment applications increased significantly after the completion of the first round of development and performance reviews conducted in late 2006. With senior management approval, secondments began to be perceived as bona fide ‘applied research activity’ and enquiries and applications soared.

The SCEPTRE fellowships can be individual, joint or team fellowships. Fellows are appointed for one year (equivalent to three months full-time employment) to undertake a research and development project exploring an area of curriculum innovation. In addition to replacement costs, fellows receive a personal award paid in three instalments. Again further funding is available to fellows for conference attendance/ study visits. Twelve fellowships were awarded between June 2006 and June 2007. The fellows originate from different schools across the university and the projects aspire to enhance professional learning in a range of fields from ethics to spacecraft engineering. A similar number of Fellowships were allocated in 2007, with an increasing emphasis on Faculty strategies, partly in response to fellows’ drive for their new expertise to be valued ‘back at the ranch’.

Both schemes have application processes, criteria for selection of projects and a review process. They mirror the CETL initiative as a whole in that they are speculative, devoting funds to colleagues who show the promise of creativity and as such are of intrinsic interest not least because they allow for experimentation, innovation and adventure. Thus they provide an opportunity to develop an

understanding of how the change initiative envisioned by HEFCE might foster creativity with the potential to energise teaching and learning across the higher education sector. The research focus of this paper explores the ways in which creativity is fostered in the context of a culture characterised by accountability and performativity: our case studies challenge perceptions that creativity and accountability are mutually exclusive and explore the possibility that performative constraints can promote creativity.

## **Methodology**

CIPeL and SCEPTrE are unique entities that provide single case studies in their own right that cannot be replicated (Yin 1994). They are studies of the particular (Stake, 2000). We use them to provide different perspectives informing understandings of a change initiative. Case studies can be simple or complex but all tend to be purposive, bounded systems characterized by patterned behaviour and coherence (Stake, 2000). Although the study of specific cases means that the representativeness of findings cannot be taken for granted (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), in this instance, generalization is not a primary concern. The quantity of data collected is relatively limited yet we argue that what is available is of high quality in terms of the knowledge it generates. The fine-grained analysis of the experiences of secondees and fellows in their social and cultural context allows us to explore the socially constructed and constructing nature of change in the context of a complex milieu. The cases have not been chosen for the purpose of comparison, although some comparisons are inevitable and informative.

This research was undertaken as part of formative evaluation by two CETL directors, drawing on work undertaken by other researchers within the CETLs. Recognising that

their positions would influence the data collected and its interpretation, the interviews at both sites were undertaken by an external evaluator. The external evaluator was also involved in the analysis of the data, providing a check or balance to the interpretative process, maintaining some equilibrium in what Coffey (1999, p.47) refers to as the ‘analytical tightrope between familiarity and strangeness’. Any interpretation is, self-evidently, a social construction; triangulation of different positions in the process offers some assurance that this construction is trustworthy.

## **Methods**

A mixed methods approach has been adopted. Data have been collected through open discussion and semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of SCEPTrE fellows and CIPeL associates, as well as from an online survey completed by eleven CIPeL associates with the aim of gaining views on the reward and recognition strategy adopted within CIPeL. The responses from the survey provided some background awareness of the way in which the strategy is perceived. Documentary evidence and a situational analysis of the CIPeL conducted in March 2006 provided insight into contextual differences and a backdrop against which to view differences and similarities between the two CETL initiatives. Interviews with five Fellows and two associated staff were undertaken at Surrey, and with four secondees at Coventry, as part of the external evaluation of the Centres. These interviews were fully transcribed and interpreted using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) germane to a grounded theory approach. This method involves repeated searching, comparing and interrogating transcripts to establish analytical categories that are integrated into themes that address the research focus. The transcripts from the two CETLs were analysed independently by the external evaluator and one CETL

director, focusing on statements describing experiences of involvement. All statements were treated with equal worth, including those that appeared to contradict others. Four major themes were generated by this process and these are presented in the next section.

## **Findings**

The four themes arising from the analysis described above address reflect the tensions between the managerialist discourse promoting accountability and performativity evident in higher education and the potential for creativity promoted by strategies adopted in the context of the two CETLs. They relate to initial motivations and expectations, the implications of structural frameworks focusing on process or product, perceptions of collegiality and learning to get the best of all worlds (“finding creative space”).

### *Motivations and expectations*

The CIPeL associates and SCEPTrE fellows saw the schemes as giving them time for projects they valued that would otherwise be impossible to undertake.

I came in at the beginning thinking that this was an opportunity to do something I really want to do. I needed some time out. (CIPeL Associate)

Although financial incentives were recognised, these were not seen as a primary motivation. The online survey for CIPeL at Coventry University found that staff would have availed themselves of the opportunity for a secondment regardless of a bonus payment as they felt it facilitated the development of their teaching (Krumins, forthcoming). However, in both CETLs participants affirmed that the reward provided a tangible means of ‘recognition’ for their work, reinforcing the notion that having

work validated by colleagues and made more visible leads to a sense of achievement. The financial award conferred status on the work (it could be designated as a funded activity, irrespective of how much the funding was) but did not seem to sustain motivation: participants felt that the scheme allowed them to pursue issues they cared about.

Quite a lot of thought went into it in terms of being useful to students, so it had a real purpose.  
(SCEPTrE Fellow)

I saw it as an opportunity to look and see, find out more and develop my teaching. (CIPeL Associate)

These were projects that may not otherwise have developed. In some cases this was described as being due to conservatism within the department, which echoes problems of ‘culturization’ and lack of innovation associated with performativity (Avis, 2005). One fellow, for example, described the fellowship as being “about facilitating risk and testing out ideas that might have remained dormant”.

At the same time, the enquiry identified a need for recognition or a wish to increase visibility and to have activities valued.

I feel completely unrecognised and unrewarded. So it was one way for me to stamp my feet and say, Oy! Y'know, I'm here, I'm here, recognise me. (SCEPTrE Fellow)

Exploration of motivations and expectations within CIPeL and SCEPTrE illustrated how academics are conditioned to think and work in a prescribed ways.

Some CIPeL secondments were influenced by associated applied research status.

I have to produce six papers a year, that's what's in my [Annual review] so this [a paper based on CIPeL work] is one. (CIPeL Associate)

Fellows anticipated that proposals would need to take a more conventional, outcomes driven, project based approach so were uncertain about what was required of them. This resulted in feelings of uncertainty. CIPeL secondees' uncertainties stemmed to a large extent from limited knowledge of what was possible with respect to technology. These uncertainties were linked to the fact that bids to both CETLs were frequently overly ambitious.

It's not one learning object but four. (CIPeL Associate)

This might be interpreted as a performative response, reflecting the perceived need to promise significant outcomes associated with competitive application processes and the performative culture in the academy, particularly in relation to accountability and measurement (Lyotard, 1984).

### *Product and process*

CIPeL and SCEPTrE differ markedly with respect to the ways in which their secondments and fellowships work. This difference stems from dissimilar contextual influences that generate variance in the ways in which 'outputs' are valued. CIPeL secondments are primarily product focused in that there is shared expectation that the secondment will result in an e-resource as a tangible outcome of the secondment, although this might bring with it the benefits of other involvement with the centre with respect to scholarship, research and evaluation and dissemination opportunities.

It's given me the satisfaction that I actually have produced something right the way through. I have produced something before... that was about ten years ago. (CIPeL Associate)

This CIPeL associate suggests that such project opportunities were rare prior to the establishment of the CETL. SCEPTrE fellows recognised this new opportunity, but

also talked about the different nature of the challenge: SCEPTrE fellowships are less project-focused and more process-focused, allowing for *emergent* rather than pre-defined outcomes:

They are so open to experimental things here that I don't think the outcome was the point. I think it was trying new processes, trying something different that might be good. (SCEPTrE Fellow)

This level of ‘freedom’ was valued highly by fellows who experienced scope to “experiment with [their] own ideas”. Initially it came as quite a surprise to some fellows who had expected closer monitoring consistent with demands for accountability and the requirement to show ‘value for money’ (Keenoy, 2005). There was a sense of liberation from the monitoring and auditing processes that usually accompany such funding.

Similarly, despite CIPeL secondments being product-focused, associates did not feel too burdened by monitoring.

It was very fluid at the time because they were developing it because it really was right at the very beginning. [the format of the work] was very loose.

The process of producing e-resources was seen as developmental reflecting the experience of fellows who felt comfortable changing details of their projects if it turned out that these had been unrealistic. However, most participants saw potential benefit in imposing constraints such as deadlines and closer monitoring, supporting Tosey’s (2006) suggestion that constraints can be a positive force for creativity

If somebody had said right, because it was supposed to be finished by August.... but actually there was always an understanding that it could slip, and slip and slip.

Significantly, where outputs were expected, these did not have to be conventional, measurable artefacts or resources. For example, within SCEPTrE, improved understanding was considered a valuable output (particularly when shared and disseminated). As a consequence, a project that failed to produce its outputs would be seen as a success if those involved learnt from the experience and shared that understanding with colleagues. As a consequence, although some forms of monitoring were in place, they managed to avoid the ‘blame culture’ (Avis, 2005) often associated with such target setting.

One of the things I like about working with SCEPTrE is that you never get a feeling of failure.

(SCEPTrE Fellow)

Differences in the experience of participants reflect the ethos of the two CETLs. The emphasis on projects within CIPeL generates a product-focused ethos; in contrast, the process-focused ethos of SCEPTrE reflects an attempt to avoid performative constraints and promote creativity. However, even here, freedom and creativity is tempered by performative requirements such as end-dates for funding. Yet participants found that, in moderation, these could support creativity by providing structure and direction. These differences in style illustrate how CETLs are embedded in institutional cultures that act to temper any idealistic vision of how CETLs as bounded entities pursuing their own goals might act.

### *Experiencing collegiality*

The value that Hudec (2006) places on collegiality as a context for successful management allows for useful connections to be drawn between the positive experiences of fellows and associates in their respective communities and their

creative projects that might be recognised as ‘outputs’. By acknowledging performative discourses within the context of collegiality, Hudec allows for the possibility that collegiality might not necessarily fail or be eroded within the context of managerial or performative institutional cultures, as suggested by Cowen (1996).

Networks of collegiality are not easy to measure, which could be problematic, given the widespread influence of monitoring and target setting described earlier. Nevertheless, participant perceptions of CIPeL and SCEPTrE indicate that a culture which secondees and fellows experience as collegial is directly beneficial to their projects.

The perceived importance of dialogue is very clear.

We are picking up ideas from each other.... you need a group, others around you to generate ideas. (CIPeL Associate)

I think we are learning quite a lot from each other about how other people view aspects of teaching, learning and development. (SCEPTrE Fellow)

One SCEPTrE fellow reflected,

One of the things I think has been most positive about the fellowship is that I’m sharing it with a colleague and it’s been very, very supportive to be sharing it with a fellow worker.

Another fellow found benefit in the ease with which s/he could “talk to people we might never have met”. The impact of generating and sharing ideas and the novelty of experiencing such a strong sense of collegiality is a revelation.

We had one of our group meetings [...] and everyone just suddenly started sharing resources and ideas. It was magical. (SCEPTrE Fellow)

The importance of relationship building is emphasised by a CIPEL associate as s/he attempts to explain experiences of becoming part of a CIPeL community reflecting that it is “about trusting and getting to know one another”. This is echoed in the comments of a SCEPTrE fellow who states:

It's a whole support network you never knew you could have.

This challenges Cowen's (1996) pessimism about the future of collegiality. In spite of the potentially individualising tendencies of performative cultures, collegiality seems to be thriving within the two CETLs. Moreover, this has implications for fostering creativity. Although this is often thought of as an individual attribute (Sternberg & Lubart, 1993) our findings suggest that collaboration with colleagues enriches creative processes. A collegial ethos appears to enhance both engagement (Tosey, 2006) and the immersion identified as necessary to creative projects (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006).

#### *Finding creative space*

This final theme draws together those that precede it illustrating how associates and fellows experienced the pressures of performativity, and yet found a way to preserve their creativity in spite of this. It highlights the agency with which academics negotiate their concerns over accountability and productivity while exploiting creative opportunities.

Despite the robustness of the schemes in both CETLs, associates and fellows identified problems in leaving everyday commitments behind in order to undertake this new, creative work. Experiences varied with respect to how much, if any, release from existing commitments they managed to secure. Several felt that they were

expected to “maintain their input and perform to their usual standard as well as being seconded”, because tight staffing meant that there was no slack in the system.

Although experiences varied, both secondments and fellowships were characterised by ‘juggling’. In other words, academic staff remained accountable for their everyday responsibilities. This was part of the culture of ‘getting the job done’ that one might argue is not conducive to creativity. Nonetheless, ‘juggling’ enabled them to create opportunities for their new work, for example by using existing work commitments, such as teaching, as sites for exploring their creative projects. A potential CIPeL secondee related how s/he intended to negotiate development and performance review objectives “to tick the right boxes but get something out of it for me”. This reflects the concern with managerialism that only ‘what gets measured gets done (Blalock, 1999) but also expresses some sense of personal agency, using the process so that it is personally meaningful as well as a mechanism for control.

Being able to negotiate such space to accomplish something outside of the everyday seemed to rejuvenate interest in their job, as a SCEPTrE fellow expressed.

I feel really invigorated by my involvement with SCEPTrE.

It is heartening that creative life has thrived within the CETLs. Associates and fellows have created a means of reconciling the pressures of their work with opportunities afforded by CETL involvement, even though this may sometimes be hard.

### **Discussion: synergies between performativity and creativity**

Although CETLs are a funded, accountable programme and can be seen as centrally-directed interventions in pedagogic practice, the experiences of participating academics contrasts with experiences of accountability found elsewhere in the

literature. Whilst documented experiences focus on the directive, imposed nature of monitoring and targets, and the review of literature identified concerns that pedagogic choice was shifting from personal judgement to institutional strategy, the experience here is one of adaptability and negotiation. This was the case even within the CIPeL CETL, where the influence of the institution's performative discourses was felt most keenly.

The CETL policy's emphasis on processes, learning and re-negotiation seems particularly important in this respect. HEFCE's agenda to build understanding (2004) has allowed different kinds of performance to be managed. Being able to count an informative failure as a positive outcome promotes risk-taking, encouraging creativity. Even within the product-oriented framework of CIPeL, this was reflected. The scope for re-negotiation of projects ensured that the work remained relevant as academics developed better understanding of the issues in practice and in theory.

It may be that the low-stakes investment of small amounts of money in these projects has helped with this. The level of investment is large enough that the work can be 'counted' – it is classed as income generating, which carries some status – it is small enough that burdensome financial processes would cost more than they could save, and so have been replaced by light-touch forms of reporting. Money seems to be important as an excuse to do the work that these participants care about; although it is useful in achieving these ends, it does not dominate activity or reporting reinforcing the perception that extrinsic motivators are less important than intrinsic motivators to highly creative people (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Again, this contrasts strongly with the ethos of efficiency and financial stringency often associated with new managerialism. It might be possible to criticise the work for being 'self-indulgent', a

criticism the original advocates of this philosophy levelled at many public sector activities. However the modest amounts of money involved mean that the risk of waste is low, given that many of these initiatives meet or exceed expectations (for instance, the production of “not one learning object but four”) due to the passion of the participants undertaking them.

The secondment and fellowship schemes drew in academic staff looking for creative opportunities, possibly because such people always tend to find outlets to satisfy their creative drive (Csikszentmihalyi (1996). They offered space for participants to “do something [they] really wanted to do”, to engage with “experimental things” with “a real purpose”.

This might initially suggest that the CETLs fostered imaginative and intuitive kinds of creativity (from the possible range identified in our review). However, our case studies illustrate how participants’ experienced benefits from the performative constraints that framed their work, gaining a sense of direction and purpose as suggested by Tosey’s model of complexity and emergence (2006). The importance of working with ‘good constraints’ needs to be recognised and valued as a positive aspect of accountability. Such motivating constraints would seem to be part of providing suitable conditions and trusting that change will come (Saunders et al, 2007). The narratives of supportive structures and collegiality highlighted by the cases described here may be more attractive to academics potentially intimidated by the uncertainties of creative work.

Academics working with these two CETLs have nurtured thriving subcultures that challenge fears about the erosion of collegiality (Cowen 1996) in the expansion of performative cultures. The initiatives have succeeded in building new collegial

groups, bringing together colleagues who “might never have met”, enabling “sharing of resources and ideas” around related interests and access to “a whole support network you never knew you could have”. This has created new links across departmental structures and created counter-cultures of collaboration. As Tosey (2006) argues, creativity can be seen as a social attribute, as well as a personal trait; these case studies show creative interactions, supported by collegial networks leading to enhanced outputs for student learning as well as individual understanding and professional learning.

## **Conclusions**

Creativity is a value which, though we may believe we choose it for ourselves, may in fact make us complicit with what today might be seen as the most conservative of norms: compulsory individualism, compulsory innovation, compulsory performativity and productiveness, the compulsory valorization of the putatively new (Osborne, 2003, p. 507).

Osborne’s view that by aspiring to creativity we are almost tricked into responding to the discourse of performativity seems rather cynical. The experiences of the Fellows and Secondees in these studies suggest that it may also be naïve to underestimate their abilities to meet both extrinsic and intrinsic goals, as illustrated for example, by negotiation of performance review objectives. Rather than being merely caught in this position, they actively constructed their own compromises, learning to ‘play the game’ (or, perhaps, make their own creative spaces) so that they could reconcile the demands of accountability with the activities that they valued.

Henkel (1987) has argued previously that academics are not ‘helpless pawns in other’s games. They are reading the changes and adapting in order to sustaining their positions’. These studies show how academics learn to interpret and use performative constraints to their own advantage and in doing so find an outlet for creative forces. We may be moving towards a claim that the performative constraints are integral to the creative process.

Performativity is both socially constructed and socially constructing. The processes put in place as conditions on funding shape values, beliefs and expectations. HEFCEs creative vision is interpreted through a performative lens, which appears to be a stronger and more influential discourse in some institutional contexts than others. However, this does not mean that it is entirely lost. As the experiences of SCEPTrE Fellows and CIPeL Associates has shown, it remains possible to pursue a creative agenda for change within a performative framework – even if doing so requires one to become a skilled juggler.

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