

**WSAN SEMINAR**  
**Friday 13<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2009**  
**Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain**

**How do we know we are doing well?**

**Seminar Abstract**

Universities know as much about themselves as never before. They developed sophisticated systems of resource allocation, quality management, performance indicators, league tables, evaluation et cetera. These mechanisms became an important part of management of academic institutions. But most of the instruments focus on academic tasks and performance of universities. But nevertheless there is a big “blind spot”, and this regards the administrative and service units and tasks.

*Quality measurement in universities is focused on academic output, not on administration*

Administrative and service units often face the prejudice, that they are the last bulwark of bureaucracy within a modern institution, that lives parasitically to the academics. This prejudice denies, that administrative and service units provides a professional service, universities are strongly dependant on. So it is surprising, that the management and performance measurement of non academic units has only a shadowy existence within the debates and mechanisms for of university management. This is demonstrated e.g. in cost accounting, were this group is just called “overhead” and often there is no more analytical knowledge about this than this rough cost figure.

*Administration is just called “overhead” and the added value is not analysed*

The WSAN-Seminar 2009 will focus on this blind spot. The seminar would look at the many way of trying to demonstrate the value provided by administrative services in universities. It is often difficult to quantify this value, and so it can be problematic to secure funding for new initiatives or to resource areas adequately. Recognition of staff contribution to achieving university objectives is often also more complex to unpick which then impacts on the ability of managers to reward staff appropriately.

*We need to analyse the output, in order to be able to improve, and to be able to generate university income, and in order to motivate and reward staff*

The seminar will look at some of the various quantitative and qualitative tools available including key performance indicators, student and staff satisfaction surveys, statistical data, benchmarking, service level statements, financial indicators, league tables,

scorecards, perception surveys, focus groups, exchange visits, feedback and external accreditations. Less formal methods such as ‘happiness points’ will also be considered. How do universities use this knowledge for decision making and management procedures?

*The seminar will examine a number of measurement tools, classical and innovative ones,*

Administration and service are confronted with a lot of external and internal opinions and standards and aims about their work, which are as diverse and contradictory as the different “stakeholders”. There are legal demands, the standards within the special communities and peer groups (e.g. IT), and the demands of customers like students and academic staff. How and between whom the standards can be defined, that gives us an idea about being on the right way? How do we know, were to focus on and how can the knowledge translated into action?

*To choose a (set of) tools depends on who we need to demonstrate the output of administration to: who is our audience.*

The seminar will also look at the processes, how these mechanisms can be implemented and settled in the life of a university. As soon as one starts to work with structured management techniques and performance indicators fear comes up about a “big brother mentality” and a lack of trust and freedom. Many staff members (both scientist and non scientists) feel accused of delivering a bad performance, although their personal feeling is that of high commitment and overwork. Resistance towards this “cold and economic based” kind of management develops. This fear is often more widely held among non academics, because they feel regarded as second class university members by the academics. How can members and departments of a university being motivated to look into this mirror, reflect both about their performance and the resources they spend for, and react to the information they are confronted with?

*When we have the information: how can we persuade our staff and our academics to do something with it*

Choosing the right technique or the right mix of techniques for your environment is critical, as is mapping the tools back to the key strategic objectives of the institution so that the administrative activity is not just recognised, but is seen to contribute to the institution’s success. How can we find a good balance of self reflection and pragmatism, of analysis vs. intuition and experience, of trust in data vs. trust in units, of dependence of measurement vs. self confidence, that prevents us from paralysis by analysis but allows a more self reflecting and responsible style of management and the demonstration of value of administration and service for the academic success.

*How do we find the right balance?*