Hot topics in policy development and policy management

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The ATEM Institutional Policy Network

- A special interest group of the Association of Tertiary Education Management
- Founded in 2006
- Approximately 270 members at most Australasian universities and some other types of institution
- Holds an annual policy forum in Melbourne (next one scheduled for 26 October 2012)
- Has published *Policy without (much) pain: a guide to better practice in institutional policy development and policy management*
By institutional policy we mean

- Not government/state policy on tertiary education funding, etc.
- not policy in the sense of strategy or an unwritten convention
- but texts that are approved as ‘policies’ by the tertiary institution
- and also, for convenience, texts that stand in a hierarchical relationship to policies, such as procedures, instructions
- and also superior texts: statutes, regulations, rules (the ‘delegated legislation’) of the institution.
- Thus, the policy framework of the institution means the framework of texts approved by the State Government, council, committees and the executive to regulate the institution’s activities.
Overview of this paper – the current hot topics

- Institutional policy gatekeeping
- Effective policy implementation
- Effective policy training/communication
- (A digression on the symbolism of policy)
- Resource-efficient consultation
- Drafting for web reading habits
- Getting the policy framework right – esp. at the top and bottom
- The state of the art web policy repository
Institutional policy gatekeeping

❖ Purposes:
  ✔ to prevent proliferation of single-topic policies
  ✔ to lead the overall approach to the policy framework

❖ A senior committee that is responsible for:
  ✔ coherence of the policy suite – where does a new policy proposal fit in? Is a policy the appropriate level of text?
  ✔ consistency of style and level of detail
Effective policy implementation

- It isn’t enough to post a new policy and announce it in the staff newsletter.

- Staff need to:
  - understand how the policy is relevant to them
  - understand what, if anything, needs to change in their work
  - be engaged with the set of policies relevant to their work.
Effective policy implementation *contd*

- For a major new/amended policy, ‘roadshows’
  - workshops at each campus or in each faculty
  - presentations to relevant committees
  - begin to keep a register of implementation issues for early review.

- A newsletter of new policy developments

- Specialised newsletters for areas of activity, maintained by business owners of sets of policies:
  - eg, an HR policy newsletter
Effective policy training/communication

- It isn’t enough to train/communicate on a policy once, as:
  - new staff join the institution
  - staff change roles within the institution
  - people forget.

- Online policy induction/refresher modules
- Introduction to . . . training days
- Building engagement and local capacity – policy champions
- Social networks of policy stakeholders?
The symbolism of policy

❖ You may by now be noticing some unspoken assumptions

❖ Perhaps we need to explore the symbolism of policy for a moment

Have you ever heard anyone say: ‘We need the policy to say/forbid this’ with the air of believing that:

‘The policy says this = this will be the case.’
The letter killeth
ten times of life
Words are more than nine
Yet hath the law a hold on thee

Beware of magical thinking!
Having writ, move on
The moving finger writes and,

The symbolism of policy contd
The symbolism of policy

❖ Is policy a

❖ management system for controlling behaviour?
❖ invulnerable armour against complaints?
❖ ritual to placate external auditors?
❖ oracle to tell us the meaning of our work?
❖ living web that connects all parts of the institution?
❖ esoteric language that confers power on its speakers?
❖ flawed human construct to which we attribute meaning?
Increasingly, institutional policy frameworks require consultation in the development/review of policies. This avoids the extremes of:

- over-restrictive policies that cannot be complied with operationally
- over-flexible policies that permit inefficient/confusing diversity.

We’re all busy, so consultation needs to be resource-efficient.

Easiest to consult with key leaders in:

- learning and teaching
- student administration, or
- other broad policy areas (HR, resources, IT)

and have texts reviewed by operational reference groups.
Resource-efficient consultation \textit{contd}

\begin{itemize}
  \item But what if the key leaders don’t have a good network?
  \item What if they have a policy=control mindset? (ie, consultation can be token?)
  \item You may need to have a network of your own – this tends to happen if you develop and management policy well.
  \item One or two ‘bellwether stakeholders’ in each large unit may be enough.
  \item Or you may have to put up with some flawed policies and try over time to show them the benefits of sincere consultation.
  \item One other efficient consultation tip: consult on impact, compliance measurement and the implementation/communication plan all at the same time.
\end{itemize}
Drafting for web reading habits

- Means overview and drill down
  - Concise policies
  - Moderate level of detail in procedures – operational rules
  - Detailed instructions for staff
  - How about instructions for students? – how to use this policy

- Dare to write simply. (‘It isn’t policy unless it’s impenetrable.’)
Getting the policy framework right

#1: Getting the upper tiers right

- Relationship between delegated legislation and policy
- Legislation is explicitly authorised by Parliament; it has legal weight.
- In administrative law theory, policy can be an ‘irrelevant consideration’ . . . only the legislation exists.
- So far, however, judges seem to accept arguments in terms of whether institutions comply with their policies
- But many institutions take a cautious approach, drafting regulations that are, in effect, high-level procedures.
Getting the policy framework right

#2: Delegation

- If the legislation provides authority (eg, to Academic Board, deans)
- then it must be delegated to those who make the decisions.
- Most efficient to delegate to positions, roles:
  - ‘selection officer’, ‘board of examiners’, ‘program leader’
- Many institutions maintain a schedule of delegations.
Getting the policy framework right

#3: Getting the operational tiers right

- Below the procedure tier
- Institution-wide instructions – need to be mandatory.
- Local instructions/guidelines – need to be placed in relationship to institutional texts
A state-of-the-art policy repository:

- Our work is mainly online now. A highly usable web policy repository is essential.

- Such a repository would:
  - include all institutional policies, procedures and instructions
  - include previous versions of these texts
  - include all local instructions and guidelines
  - enable texts to have reasonably complex formatting (tables, internal hyperlinks, variety of list formats)
  - provide the ability to print texts easily
A state-of-the-art policy repository:

❄ Would: *contd*

✓ have Google-standard search functionality
✓ be searchable by title, metadata and full text
✓ have consistent, thorough metadata
✓ also list texts alphabetically
✓ also list texts by area of activity: eg, ‘learning and teaching’, ‘student administration’
✓ provide an online questions/issues link for each text, generating an email to the policy owner and feeding in to the issues log for review
✓ enable readers to subscribe to be notified of changes to any text.
A state-of-the-art policy repository:

Would: *contd*

- ✓ include a draft policies posting and feedback page
- ✓ include a new/recently amended policies page with a summary of key points/changes
- ✓ include a toolkit for policy development/review:
  - ✓ templates for ✓ policy initiation proposal
  - ✓ each level of text
  - ✓ consultation plan
  - ✓ issues register
- ✓ and flow-charts for the development/review and approval process.
A vision of effective institutional policy development and policy management

- Coherent institutional policy leadership
- A well-considered policy framework
- Clearly-written texts
- A reasonable balance between compliance-driven policy and use of policy to achieve institutional connectedness
- Good networks for consultation/implementation
- A highly usable web policy repository
Hot topics in policy development and policy management

Your questions are welcome.