An Engaged University: the practices of NMMU academics

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What the session aims to do

- Provide an interpretation of the current challenge of 'engagement' at NMMU

- Describe the research project

- Present a brief overview of the survey sample and population

- Illustrate how we are analysing the main patterns of engagement at NMMU

- Highlight key aspects of policy, structures and incentives to promote engagement

- Raise strategic questions for discussion

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The challenge of institutionalisation

- NMMU context of merger, multiple campus, new identity as comprehensive university

- Process of strategic policy alignment, prioritising 'engagement' at institutional level

- BUT delays in formal approval of policy framework

- On base of long standing practices of academics at all sites, driven by individual motivations and capacities

⇒ Ad hoc institutional approach to promote engagement – not systematic nor strategic

⇒ A strength = clear conceptual framework centred on encompassing notion of '**engagement**'

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How can evidence from the research project inform the **strategic institutional approach**?

How is 'engagement' reflected in the **practices of academics**?

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Objective and questions

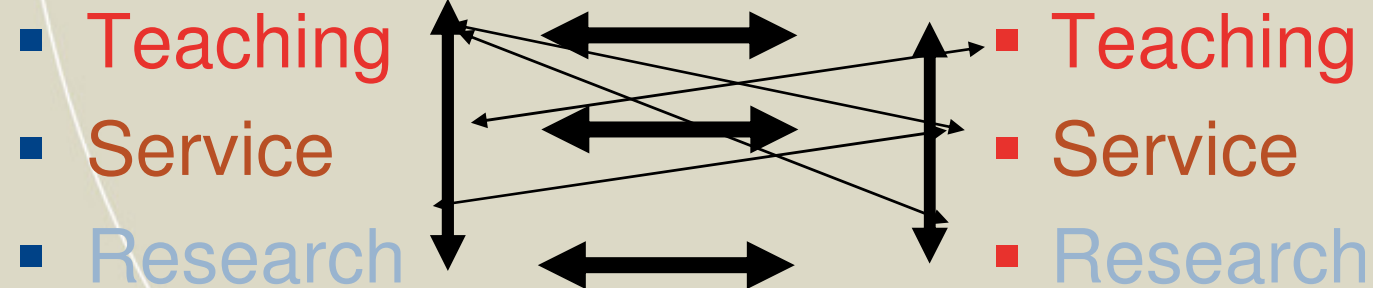Map the scale and forms of interaction with external social partners, to contribute to understanding (community) engagement and the changing role of the university in building a national system of innovation

- What are the scales and forms of interaction in diverse disciplinary or knowledge fields?
- What are the scales and forms of interaction in different types of university?
- What are the outcomes, benefits and risks of these forms of interaction?
- What are the institutional conditions that facilitate and constrain interaction?

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Scholarship for direct benefit of external audiences

ENGAGED/
RESPONSIVE

Not ENGAGED/
Not RESPONSIVE

- Teaching
- Service
- Research

- Teaching
- Service
- Research

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What we have done

- University case studies:
  - interviewed VCs, Deans, directors of engagement, research and teaching and key centres
  - documentary and internet sources
- Telephonic survey:
  - 2 159 academics: NMMU, CPUT, UCT, UP, UFH
  - Average response rate of 62.4%
  - NMMU response rate of 60.9%
  - 343 academics – 272 engage, 71 do not engage
  - 21% NMMU do not engage > 19% average

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The survey:

"We are working with …. to survey the ways in which academics are extending their knowledge to the benefit

of external social partners"

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Profile of NMMU sample / total sample

- Most balanced: female 49% > average 44%

- 76% white > average 68%

- Similar spread of ages: 62% aged 40 to 59

- Rank: proportion of lecturer and below higher (55% > 45%), proportion of professors lower (18% < 29%)

- Highest qualification: fewer doctorates (34% < 41%), more masters (42% > 36%) than average

- Knowledge field: SET 47% (< average) Humanities 22% Business&Commerce 18% Education 13% (> average)

- Realised sample represents NMMU academic population well

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The dimensions

- **Social partners**
- **Types of relationship**
- Channels of interaction
- **Outputs**
- Outcomes
- Challenges
- Those who do not engage – why not?

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What are the main patterns of engagement at NMMU?

Emerging – and indicative -

analysis of the NMMU data

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NMMU conceptual distinctions

Engagement: Professional service provision	Engagement: Teaching and Learning	Engagement: Research and Scholarship	Outreach and community service
Service to internal and external communities based on academic disciplines or university roles	Contextualisation of learning in community contexts, collaborative, mutually beneficial	Research partnerships to direct benefit of external partners	Inform or improve quality of life for marginalised sectors of local community, service, one way flow
eg consultancy, impact assessment, public debate, exhibitions	eg service learning, work integrated learning, short programmes, internships	eg contract research, participatory action research, technology transfer	eg volunteerism, community outreach, student recruitment programmes, sport activities

Partners: describing the main trends

- **Total sample engaged on widest scale with other knowledge partners:** SA universities; international universities; funders

- NMMU engaged with social constituencies: schools, a local community, individual and households…NGOs

- Firms more than government: SMMEs, large… MNCs

- Government: more likely local or provincial

- Specialised social constituencies: clinics, welfare, small farmers

- Not organised civil society constituencies: political organisations, trade unions, civic associations

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Reduce complexity – partner factors

1. **Firm partners:** MNEs, SMMEs, large firms
2. **Civil society:** Civics, political orgs, trade unions, social movements, community orgs
3. **Community:** Schools, individuals and households, local community
4. **Academic:** International univs, funding agencies, science council, SA univs
5. **Welfare:** Welfare agencies, clinics, NGOs
6. **Government**: provincial governments, local government, national government

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Types of relationship: knowledge transmission dominates

- Teaching related most common, all on a wider scale than average

- Alternative forms of academic practice / good : isolated to moderate scale, but sizable…..

- Revenue generating : customised training, M&E, research consultancy, (collaborative R&D), technology transfer, on wider scale than average

- Specialised applied knowledge relationships: contract research, design and testing clinical services, commercialisation

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Types of relationship and partners?

- Knowledge application is significantly associated with firm, civil society, academic and government partners
  - Those who engage more frequently in knowledge application activities are more likely to do so with firm partners – and so on….
- Outreach is significantly associated with all partners
- What kinds of relationships with diverse partners can NMMU deepen and promote in terms of the conceptual framework and strategic vision?

What are the outputs from engagement with diverse partners?

- Academic outputs are strongly associated with academic and government partners only
  - Those academics who interact more frequently with a government partner, tend to have more academic outputs
- Social outputs are associated with all partners except firms
- Technology outputs are strongly associated with firm, academic partners and suprisingly, civil society and community partners
- What practices are being highlighted by these trends?
- **What is the balance of social partners that would lead to the desired kinds of outputs?**

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How can this data be useful?

- Inform strategic policy implementation by highlighting the types of relationship and partners currently existing in practice – how do they match with the proposed conceptual framework?

- Identify and target types of relationship or partners or outputs that the institution wishes to promote strategically, in line with NMMU strategic vision

- Inform debate around the substantive meaning of engagement at NMMU

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Analysing policy, structures and incentives to promote engagement

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A growing policy alignment in NSI

Higher education policy	Science and technology policy
Focus on equity, responsiveness to social justice and promoting public good	Focus on big science, economic demand and promoting global competitiveness
Shift to promote 'community engagement' as integral to academic scholarship	Shift to include a focus on 'broad based social innovation' and technology for poverty reduction

How do universities give effect to the growing policy alignment and an integrated economic and social development mission?

4 critical aspects

- Insertion into institutional power structures
  - Increasing prioritisation into senior management structures, plan for highly structured accountability
- Coherent institutional policy and conceptual framework
  - Prioritised in Vision 2020 but engagement policy framework awaits formal approval
  - Strength is clear conceptualisation of a continuum of forms of 'engagement'
- Coordination and alignment of internal university structures for research, teaching, innovation outreach
  - Ad hoc, lack of strategic coordination
- University-wide dissemination and incentive mechanisms
  - Embryonic, performance criteria and workload

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Thank you!

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