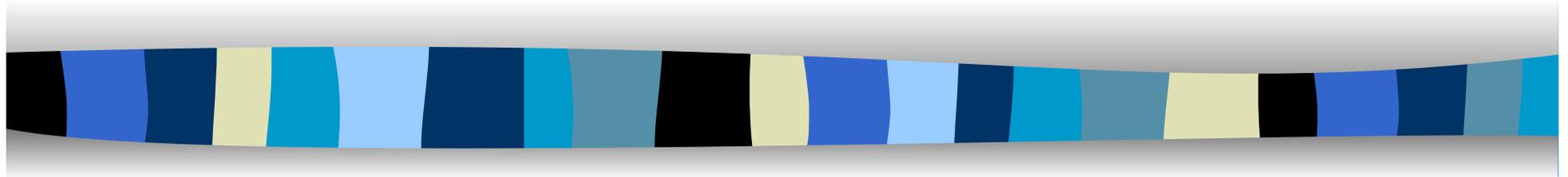


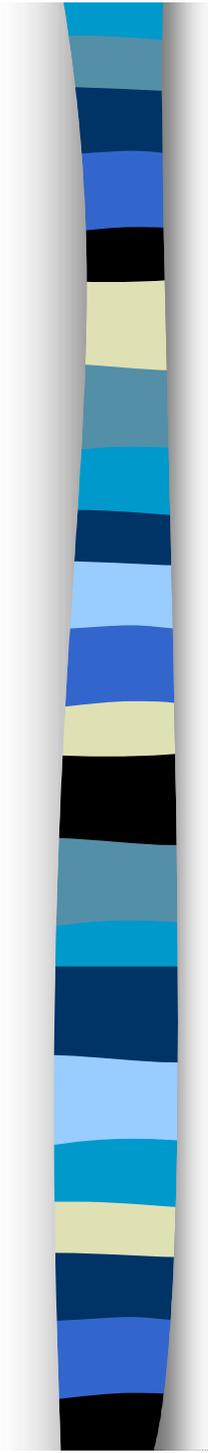
# Leading the Supercomplex University



Ronald Barnett

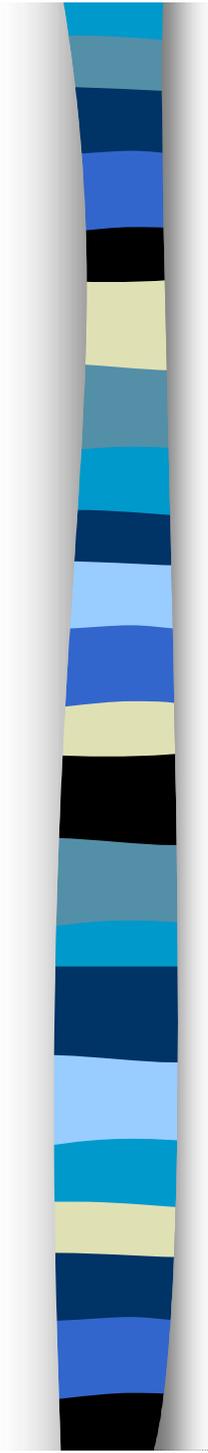
*Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

University of Warwick, 6 July 2006



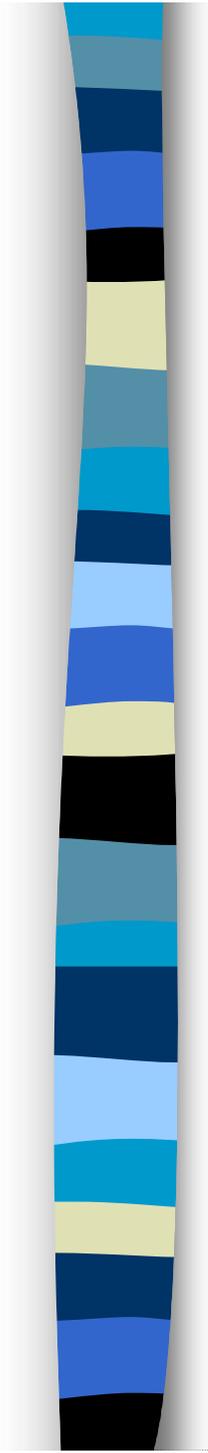
## Not just complexity but *supercomplexity*

- The university – a place of complex systems
- But the university is also a place of ‘soft tissue’ challenges
- Every move is contested
- And there is no end to such ‘dissensus’
- What should be the response to such ‘supercomplexity’?



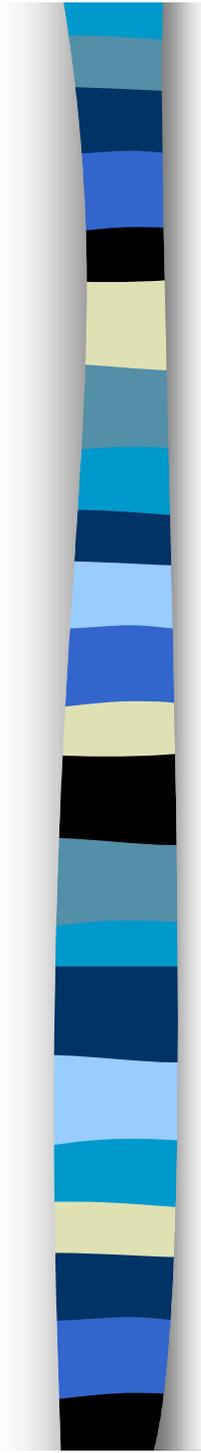
# Inevitable conflict

- Not just that individuals conflict
- Or different stakeholders – inside/ outside
- But that the university's agendas themselves are bound to be in tension
  - Local/ global
  - Enterprise/ service
  - Standards/ inclusivity
  - Transparency/ keeping the cards close to the chest
  - Academic excellence/ income generation
  - Competition/ collaboration
- These are never-ending differences of orientation



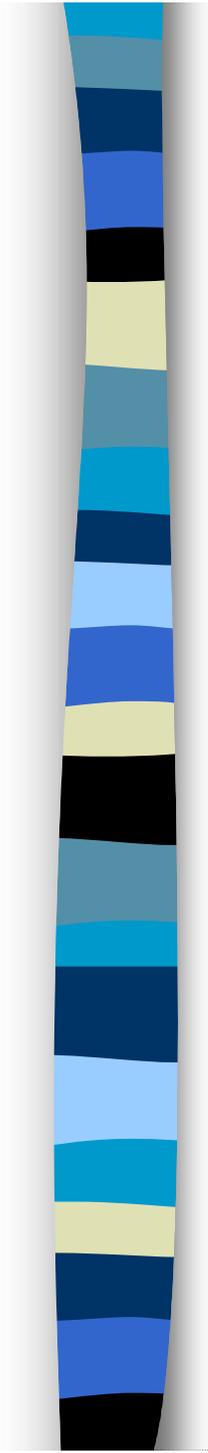
# The liquid university

- Multiple currents
- Some intermingling; some remaining separate
- Nothing is settled
- Unpredictability *and* contestability
- Can there be principles onto which the university can hold?



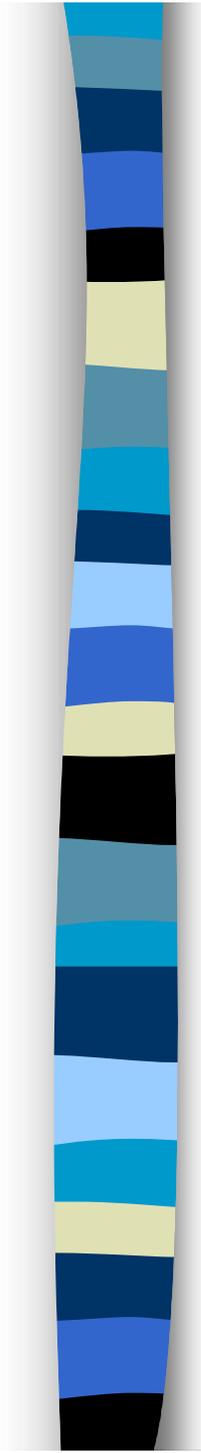
# Can the big questions really be asked?

- What is a ‘university’?
- What is a ‘professor’?
- What is ‘research’?
- What is ‘learning’?
- What is a ‘student’?
- Are some questions just off-limits?
- Some words simply awkward now? (‘passion’? ‘faith’? ‘truth’?) And the cause of any awkwardness?



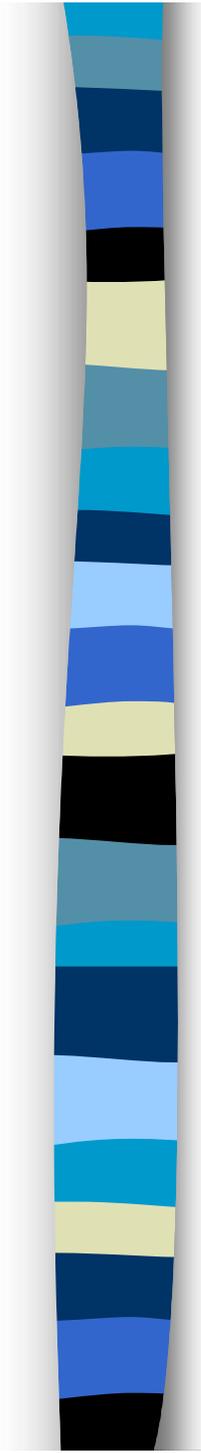
# Leading the supercomplex university

- Handling multiple and conflicting agendas that have *no resolution*
- So 3 problems for strategy formation:
- Future uncertainty; systems complexity; and contested agendas.
- Dissolution of boundaries.



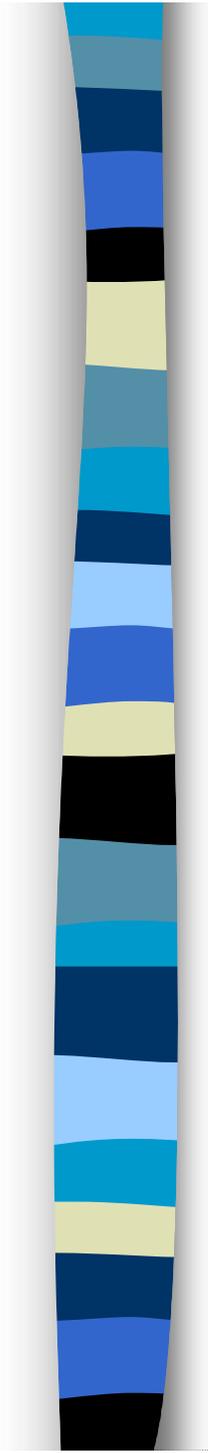
## The snare of ‘evidence-based’ decision-making

- Yes, we need more data & information
- But that is not the main problem
- There is bound to be a gap between our knowledge and our decision-making
- Dilemmas cannot be resolved with more info.
- It is more a matter of ‘comportment’ (Heidegger); of living with the infinite



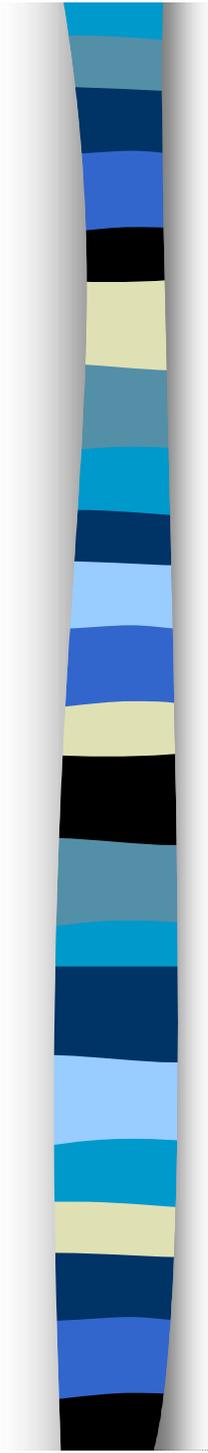
# A culture for dissent

- Blending managerial and reflective discourse
- ‘Culture’
- - a kind of superculture; precisely not of this or that
- Recognising the other
- A culture of ‘different but equal’
- What is the alternative? Suppression?



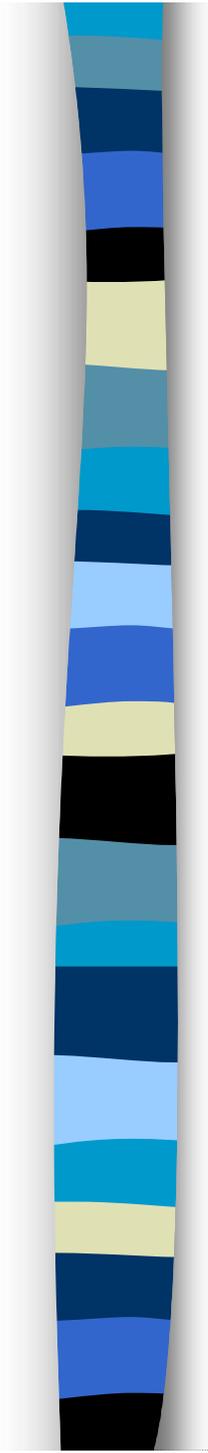
# Coaxing the liquid?

- Bridging – or merging - R and T (a role for SoTL?)
- Reinstating ‘scholarship’ – as a fuzzy category?
- NB: research and consultancy have merged?
- New forms of PhD thesis
- Juxtaposition of ID forms – humanities and medicine; design and science;
- R-led; R-informed T?
- Systematic reflective practice
- NB: tyranny of RAE – can’t handle (much) fuzziness



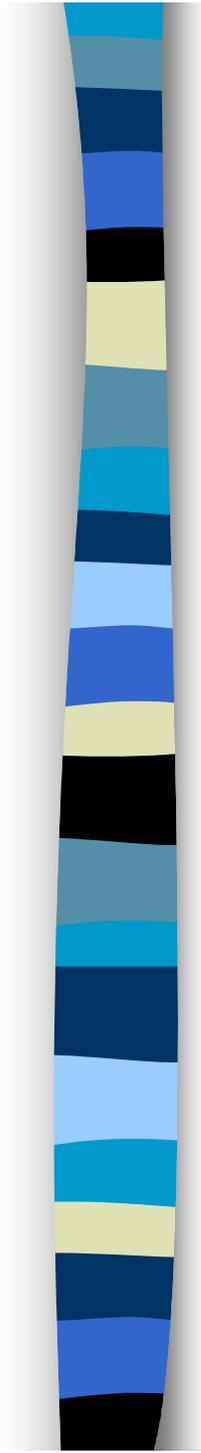
# Encouraging fluid identities

- Academic identities for a fuzzy world
- Dissolution of boundaries
- Multiple identities
- Leadership – encouraging an ease with fluidity
- But our monitoring and appraisal systems are systems-oriented



# A mission for a complex world

- Suppose a university took seriously the idea that it contribute to a complex world
- In teaching: living with contestation
- In research: contributing to public debate, but acknowledging difference
- Service to soc: being engaged, as a matter of public service



## Conclusion: new leadership; new management

- Both L and M are important
- But both more complicated amid fluidity
- L becomes a matter of compartment, of enabling the U to live with uncertainty
- And to make progress within it
- From systems to persons; to identity; to *being* itself.