

Research culture in higher education and its impact on REF success

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Introduction

The importance of research culture within higher education has emerged as a result of the increasing use of metrics in relation to numerous research and education censuses, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF). This progressive introduction of census returns has started a sector-wide debate around the impacts of such metrics on academics and academic performance, particularly how they are translated by senior management into individual performance objectives. Academic performance measurement has only increased as a result of growing financial pressures across the entire sector. This led the researcher to ask if organisational success* is linked to monitoring individual performance through objective setting or whether embedding the right culture would lead to higher performance and ultimately greater success. This led to the development of this study.

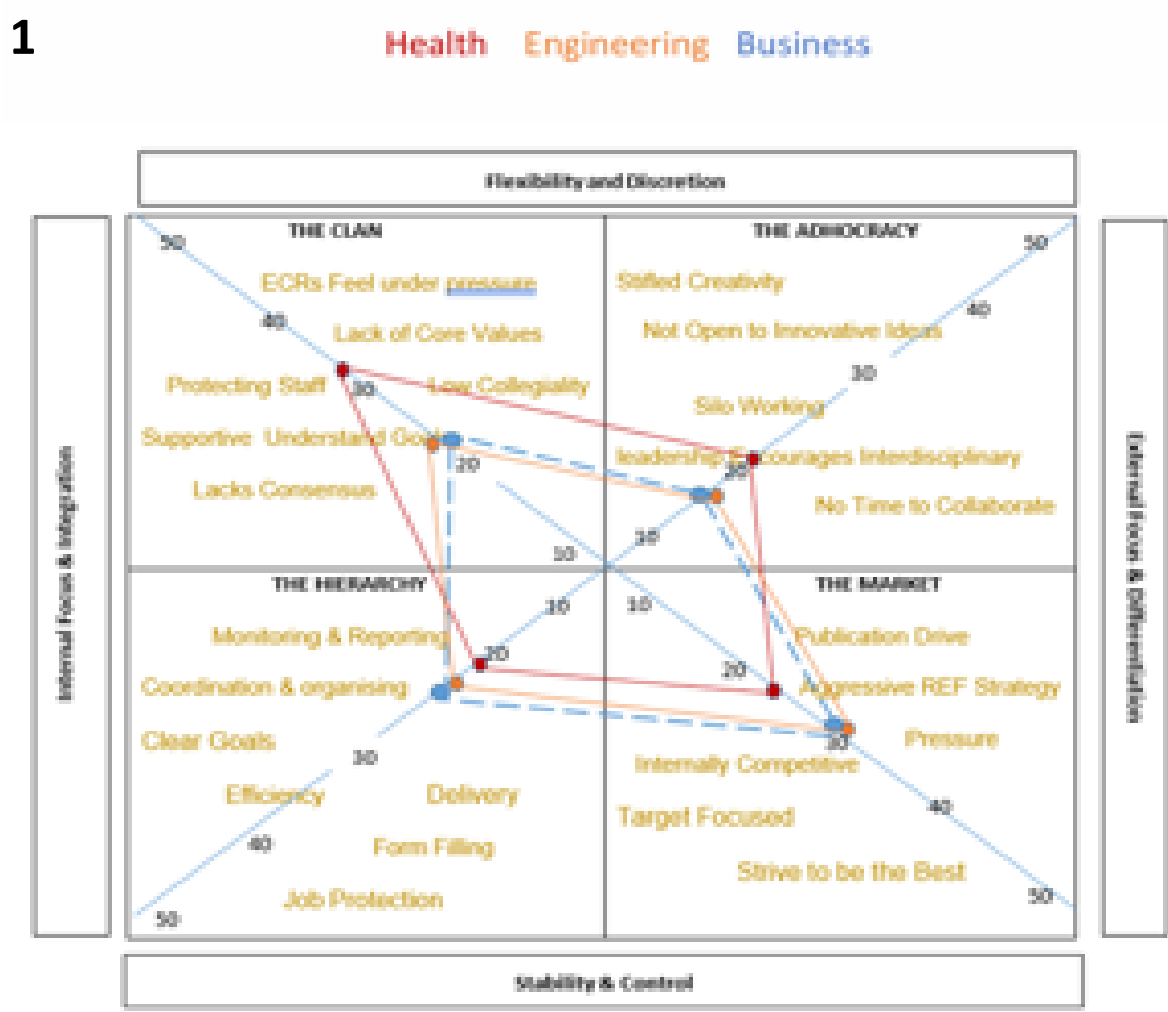
**success in this study relates to REF performance. This study was undertaken within one UK University*

Research Goals

The goals of this research were to (1) diagnose the culture of three research centres, within one University (University A), (2) determine if there was a specific culture type that could be linked to high performance in REF success and (3) assess whether the culture type was homogenous across the three participating research centres. These participating research centres were specifically chosen from Business, Health and Engineering to provide the opportunity to identify any sub-cultures derived from the different academic disciplines.

Methodologies

Mixed methods were used for primary data collection, and secondary data was used from REF 2014 and REF 2021 published outcomes. For quantitative data collection, the researcher used a survey from an established framework; the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) which diagnoses culture types: Clan, Market, Adhocracy and Hierarchy.



Congruence of what Researchers say the Culture is Now Across the Three Research Centres

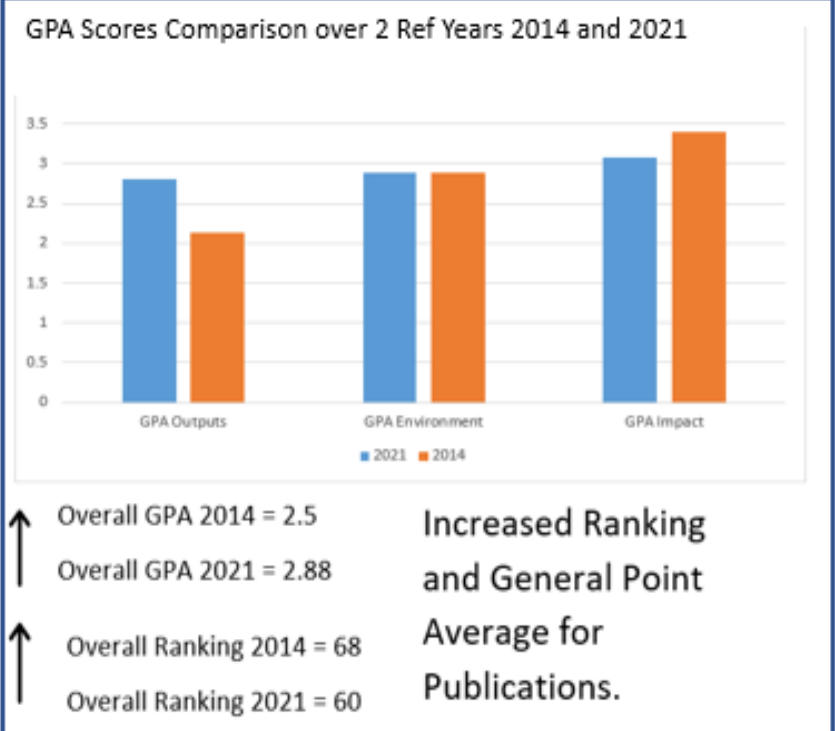
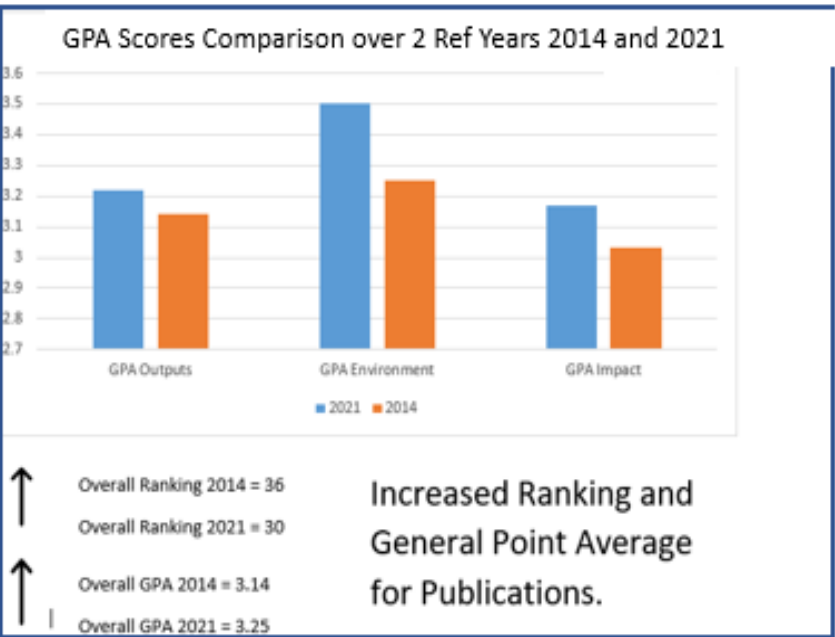
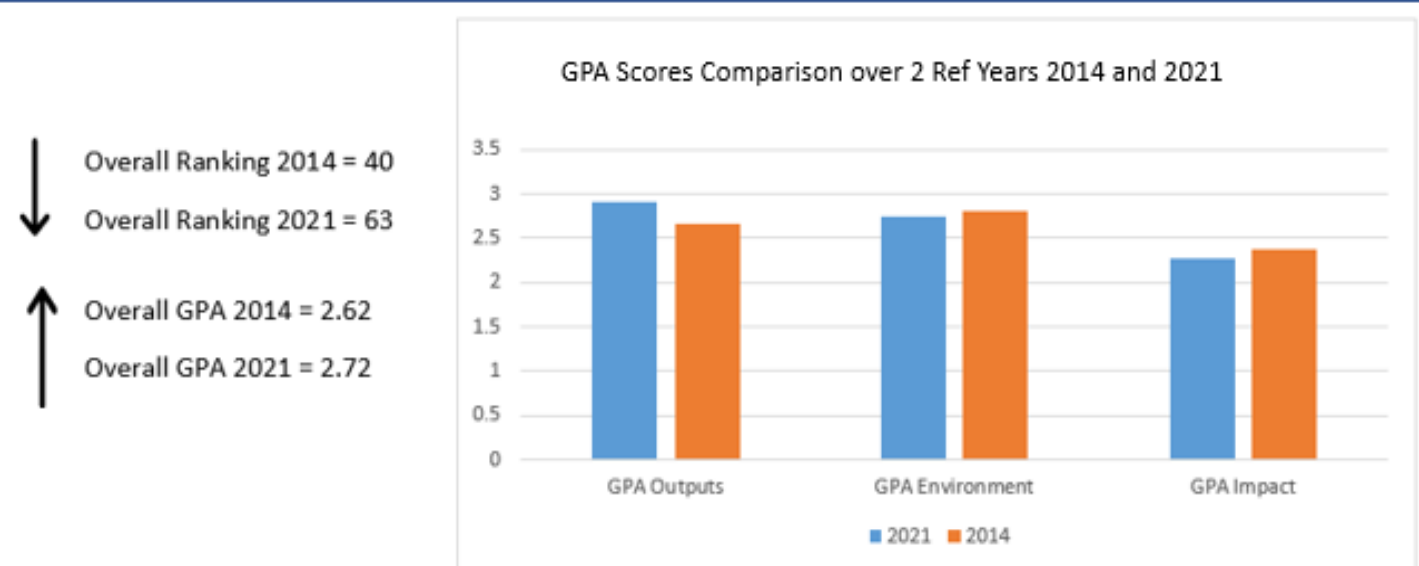
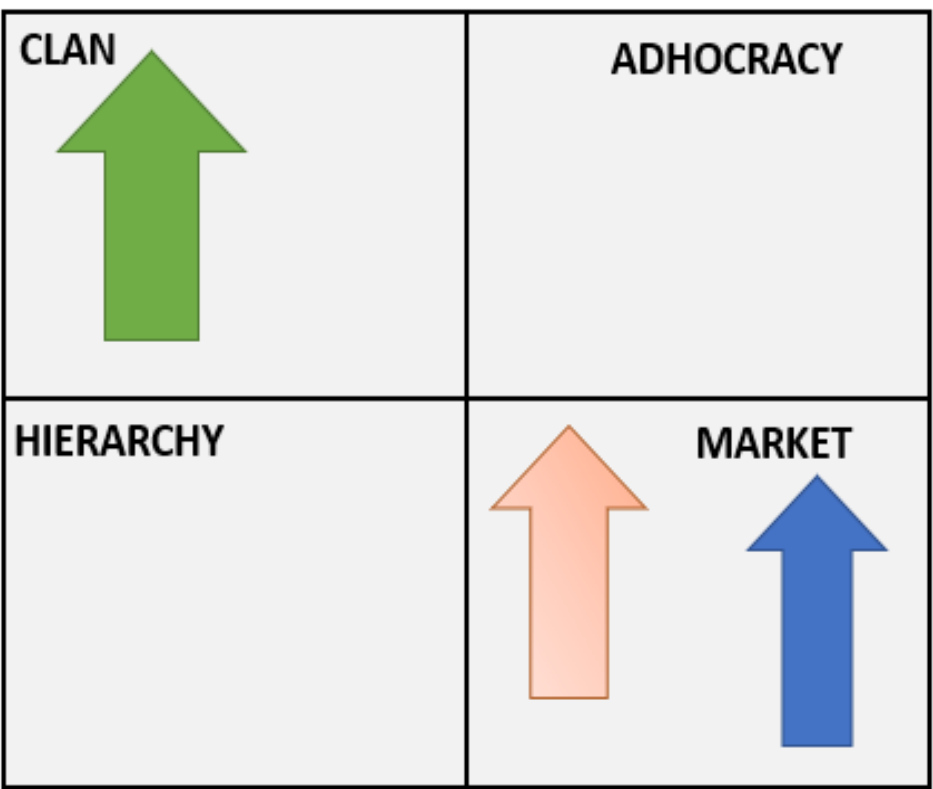
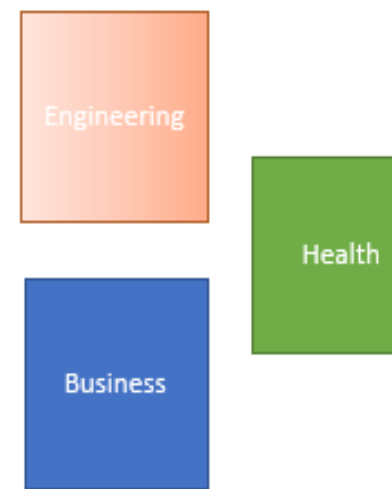


Difference Between the Culture Now & what Researchers would Prefer the Culture to be, Across the Three Research Centres

Findings

Three common themes arose : (1) a lack of innovation and creative thinking, (2) too much emphasis on performance and targets, and (3) a lack of team collaboration resulting in silo working. There was no direct correlation found between REF Success and Culture Types across the participating research disciplines (Fig 2).

3 GPA Results and Culture Type Results



Conclusion

The preferred culture type was Clan. This was homogenous across all three participating research disciplines. Qualitative findings evidenced sub-cultures were detected for each of the three disciplines through participants explanation of what it felt like to be in a Clan culture. (Fig 1). Whilst no direct cause and effect could be evidenced between REF success and any dominant culture type (Fig 3) there is evidence that REF has an impact on sub-cultures through behaviours, communication, innovation and environment.

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