

## Published reviews of Paul Trowler's work

1. Trowler, P., Saunders, M. and Bamber, R. (Eds) (Jan 2012). *Tribes and territories in the 21st-century: Rethinking the significance of disciplines in higher education*. London: Routledge.

*"The tribes and territories thesis ...has made a significant contribution to education studies in mapping ontological, epistemological and methodological shifts within education studies over 23 years" (Hughes, 2013, 261)*

Hughes, M. (2013) [Book review essay: the territorial nature of organization studies](#). *Culture and Organization*, 19 (3), 261-274. (A review of the three editions of the Academic Tribes and Territories genre).

*Trowler, Saunders and Bamber are to be commended for this book. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue in their classic text, *Metaphors We Live By*, metaphors are not simply about communicating ideas but they actually structure our perceptions and understandings. They do this by condensing up a particular cluster of ideas into an image which is memorable, which sticks. *Tribes and Territories (2001)* has offered powerful metaphors which undoubtedly have influenced, if not structured, the way we have thought about disciplines – the key argument being that the "knowledge structures of the disciplines (the academic territories) strongly condition or even determine the behavior and values of academics, who live in the disciplinary tribes..." (p. 1). Like all concepts, metaphors have their limitations both intrinsically and over time. The authors take up the challenge of re-visiting the usefulness and relevance of what have become classic ways of thinking. They pull together not only a fascinating collection of chapters but also helpfully 'book---end' the chapters with their own commentary. Thus one of the contributions of the book is to re---examine these metaphors, to consider what the metaphors don't tell us and to move us on. For this reason alone, it is likely to become another one of those classic texts – like *Becher & Trowler (2001)* -----referred to, on the reading lists of our postgraduate courses, signaling an important turn.*

Shay, S. (2014) *Academic Tribes and Territories in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A review*.  
[https://www.academia.edu/9750700/Academic\\_Tribes\\_and\\_Territories\\_in\\_21st\\_Century\\_A\\_Review](https://www.academia.edu/9750700/Academic_Tribes_and_Territories_in_21st_Century_A_Review)

2. Saunders, M. Trowler, P. and Bamber, V.(Eds) (2011) *Reconceptualising Evaluative Practices in Higher Education: the practice turn*. London: Open University Press.

*The aim of this book is....not the evaluation of higher education but instead to open up to scrutiny how value and worth are attributed through evaluation in the context of a complex and highly politicised higher education environment.... Such scrutiny of higher education evaluation practices has never been more timely.*

*The book provides a persuasive analysis of the shift from individual to institutional evaluative practices over the last two decades. Working counter to the ongoing governmental and media-led evaluative agenda that is keen to reduce the complexity of the higher education experience to bite-size, 'objective' data for easy comparison across sectors and institutions, the case studies presented here demonstrate the richness and contingent outcomes of meaningful evaluation practices for higher education.*

*[The] authors in this collaboration have made a strong case for the reconceptualising of evaluative practices that takes into account the complexity of the educational experience and the*

*nexus between evaluation and the activities that are evaluated...The case studies and subsequent discussion powerfully model how reconceptualising evaluation as a social practice can enable evaluators to think about how to communicate the outcomes of evaluation in strategically and politically-nuanced ways.*

Weller, S. (2011) *Higher Education Review*, Vol 44, No 1, 101-102

3. Trowler, P. (2008) *Cultures and Change in Higher Education: Theories and Practices*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

*"I have to say to all involved as educational developers, or in quality enhancement or those who are simply interested in trying to understanding teaching and learning in universities that it is well worth reading"*

(Prof. Robert Mathew, University of Stirling. Review for the ESCALATE subject centre, 2009). <http://escalate.ac.uk/5121>

4. Bamber, V., Trowler, P., Saunders, M. and Knight, P. (eds) (2009) *Enhancing Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Theory, Cases, Practices*. Open University Press/SRHE.

*"This is a rich and diverse collection, and will deservedly find a place on the shelves of developers, practitioners and managers working towards meaningful change in a broad range of contexts...Pragmatism and realism are strengths here, with insightful discussion throughout of the nuanced, multi-layered nature of change...Positive change is seen as desirable and doable, but crucially the dominant 'what works' brand of instrumentalism is roundly rejected. Refreshingly, the assumptions of modernist 'change management' are thoroughly critiqued, with the non-linear nature of change in universities presented as the norm. This book will hopefully allow these insights to permeate the mainstream...raising questions in particular about large-scale, monolithic, top-down agendas and how they are played out - and inviting a more realistic, local approach. [The book] represents a very valuable and much-overdue mainstream challenge to the dominant assumptions of academic development and change in universities."*

Lesley Gourlay (2009) Review in *London Review of Education*, 7, 3, 285-286.

"To whatever extent your current work involves aspiring to change the practices of others, this book will help...the book is so lovingly designed, it is hard to resist engaging with its argument....With a theoretical lens predicated upon "social practice", the authors and contributors offer an immersive experience of change in action; and, by the end of the book, their target for the biggest change is clear—it is none other than you, the reader. That kind of challenge is off-putting if, as I, you are tempted to float hopefully through innovative projects with little more than a "common sense approach to leading change" (p 184), then to be left wondering why we under-achieved. The authors are to be applauded for this—why should your own "comfort zone" be left intact when your actions are likely to breach the comfort zones of others? If we, as individuals, care about our role within higher education, this is the kind of book we should be reading—and leaving on campus coffee tables wherever we can.

Mike Johnson, (2010) *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 41, 2, E28-9.

5. Trowler, P. (1998) [Academics Responding to Change: new higher education frameworks and academic cultures](#). , Buckingham: Open University Press/SRHE. [Overview](#).

*"As an academic...I found Academics Responding to Change a powerful antidote to narrow thinking; as a manager in a new university I found it more relevant to policy and practice on the ground than any number of funding council circulars. The global pressures for HE accountability force uncomfortable choices for individuals...Trowler has illuminated these pressures but transcended them in a work of bold imagination and meticulous scholarship"*

(Prof. Rob Cuthbert (2000) Review of Academics Responding to Change, *Higher Education*, 40, 2, 243-5)

#### 6. Academic Tribes and Territories, second edition

*"Anyone who reads higher education research will have come across Trowler's name on many occasions, so we might see this second edition as handing over the baton from one generation to the next. This is an excellent book to recommend to anyone wanting to get a better idea of the nature of academic work and life; quite possibly the best single book you could recommend. It is also an object lesson in how to write in an attractive and incisive fashion. Trowler has done the higher education research community a major service in bringing Becher's seminal work up to date for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And, in doing so, the three tasks which the authors set themselves have been well achieved.*

Tight, M. (2003) *Higher Education Quarterly*, 57, 1, 94-96

*"Some academic books, however clearly one remembers them, remain part of the way one thinks about higher education and one's relationship to it. Becher's 1989 book was one such, and Academic Tribes and Territories became crucially important means - as vocabulary, as day-to-day understanding, as research strategy - of encompassing the world of higher education. The book was a major contribution to a burgeoning interest in the nature and roles of disciplines and departments as their proxies. ..What Becher achieved..was a necessary ground-clearing exercise. It provided a set of analytical instruments with which to continue to think about the strong, even dominant, roles that disciplines, their subject packages and departments played in higher education as it had been and was becoming. ..The targets of the first edition are not diminished in importance in the second, but the nature of the changes in higher education and of the international analysis of these changes inevitably produces a more complex journey towards them. Both within this journey to some extent and in the new introduction to a considerable extent, however, there is an attempt to locate the original discussion within more stringent, comprehensive theories.. A whole new range of sources is tapped for the extended argument. Trowler's own work on academics and change in a former polytechnic (published in 1998) is one such source, and there is significant attention to new data and literature on individual disciplines, cultural identity, gender and all of the other kinds of topics that have assumed priority since the first edition. New curricular situations within the institutions are given attention, including new subjects and their combination across old frontiers. There is new, particularly British, American and Canadian, evidence of changes in academic attitudes, and the reasons.. The targets of the first edition are not diminished in importance in the second, but the nature of the changes in higher education and of the international analysis of these changes inevitably produces a more complex journey towards them.*

*The book was originally a breakthrough and it remains so..Perhaps the second edition is best thought of as a continually vital text accompanied by an attempt at a history of ways of thinking in our time."*

Silver, H. (2002) *Academic Tribes and Territories Renewed*. *Higher Education Digest*, 42, 3-4.

## 7. Departmental Leadership in Higher Education

*"Peter Knight and Paul Trowler's book is a worthy contribution to the literature. Part 1 covers the socio-cultural leadership contexts of change, leadership theory and practices and leading in higher education departments. It is grounded in the theoretical perspective of 'social practice theory'. In Part 2 Knight and Trowler apply these theoretical frameworks of leadership practices to issues that affect higher education: assessment, learning and teaching, research and scholarship, administration and planning, continuing professional development and learning how to lead. This part of the book makes it unique, for excerpts from research subjects (academic leaders at all levels of activity and experience) in the field are incorporated into the extensive discussion of practice. It is, overall, a very effective piece of reflective research that outlines well the promises of good academic leadership as well as its perils."*

Gilder, A. (2001) *Higher Education in Europe*, XXVI, 2, 285-6

*"This interesting and well-written book is primarily intended for those who lead departments or other teams in higher education institutions. What [the hard-pressed HoD will find], is an intelligent and informed discussion of a range of issues rather than the bulleted lists found in so many management texts. What a shame [that most HoDs] will not find the time to read and reflect on this valuable book. Were they able to, maybe our university departments would be better led."*

Hill, T. <http://www.escalate.ac.uk/briefing/Reviews/book32.php3> (last accessed 10.3.03)

## 8. Higher Education Policy and Institutional Change

*"The editor's introduction to the chapters that follow is a tight and tart summary of contemporary critiques of the rational-purposive model of policy. Trowler reminds us of the essential incoherence of policy in reality, in which unintended consequences of seemingly straightforward policy are shaped at least as much by local conditions and issues as by central government mandate. Trowler and Knight's final chapter [is] the best of the bunch. They propose a connectivist conception of change and policy, and several characteristics of that conception. Trowler and Knight end their essay with some 15 implications of a connectivist perspective for affecting real change in schools and universities. This ending essay merits fuller explanation through a book-length manuscript."*

Marc Cutright (Ohio University) in *Higher Education*, (2004) 47, 2, pp 253-255.

*"From the model of policy and policy-making espoused in Trowler's introduction, the reader is guided through an institutional world of policy implementation far removed at times from the (ir)rational designs of policy-makers. Trowler's connecting theme is the notion of the implementation staircase (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987), a neat device enabling each essay to address various policy levels - from national contexts to 'street level bureaucrats'. Overall this volume provides ample evidence to support the notion of policy as 'contested terrain'. Its main value is in demonstrating how policy is made in various (higher) education settings, and is not just something that is handed down in tablets of stone from government and university management. Both collectively and individually [the chapters] provide some powerful critiques of*

research for policy that policy-makers (and senior managers for that matter) would be well advised to heed.

Smith, D. *Studies in Higher Education*, pp 109-110.

#### 9. Realising Qualitative Research into Higher Education

*"How nice to read a book on higher education with and methodological focus: a sign, perhaps, but higher education research, if it could not yet be said to have come of age, has at least reached puberty....Each contribution exemplifies what the editors variously describe as "fine-grained, hermeneutically grounded" (p.xii) or "close-up" (p.xiv) research, involving "detailed analysis of institutional 'undergrowth'" (p. xv). "more subtle, more penetrating" (p.xvi) questioning or the "thick description" of a case (p.xvii). They see these contributions as "methodologically part of an explosion of qualitative research right across the social sciences" (p xv), very demanding of the researchers undertaking them, yet both valuable and necessary.*

*I wouldn't disagree with any of that, even if the argument is perhaps pushed to strongly and involves a little too much jargon and my taste. But for me the real beauty of the book is the attention given by the authors to method/ological issues and underlying theoretical frameworks. It is relatively unusual to find such a detailed engagement, either in books or journals, in published higher education research....*

*I can happily recommend this book, therefore to anyone interested in learning more about the doing of higher education research, and in getting ideas as to how they might make a contribution. It's great to get away from policy critiques and small-scale, evidence-based, evaluative case studies for a while. For my part, perhaps I should go to the next Higher Education Close Up conference. It must beat listening to all those keynote speakers blaring on about higher education as economic policy."*

Malcolm Tight, Warwick University, UK. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29, 3, 410-20

#### 10. Academics Responding to Change

*"Books like this are not normally described as 'unputdownable', but I did little else until I had finished a first reading. This book is going to be exceptionally useful to me; I will gratefully adopt it as a core text both to help me into the literature and to guide my thinking on my research approach. I do not mean by this that anything in it will be slavishly followed; the clarity with which Trowler handles complex ideas helps me to see what I disagree with, what I wish to be different.*

*The breadth of reference is hugely impressive. ..Trowler cares deeply about the mass of academics. I imagine they will appreciate the research stance adopted..If he chose, Trowler could write a popular and accessible guide to academic survival; the title might be something like 'How actors can manage'".*

Holroyd, C. (1999) *Teaching in Higher Education*, 4, 3, pp 429-432

#### 11. Investigating Education and Training. Sociology in Action series. Collins Educational.

*This is the first text directly aimed at the A-level sociology market which genuinely brings the sociology of education into the 1990s.*

*It does seem rather odd that the vocationalism that has been the focus of so much controversy for more than a decade in education studies and sociology has not really been covered adequately in the majority of student textbooks on this part of the syllabus.*

*Paul Trowler's book puts this right with great style and detail - hence the word "training" in the title. In addition, we have a book which offers an insight into other aspects of the world of education and training that have largely been ignored in the standard texts.*

*A chapter on disabilities and learning difficulties is a welcome development, but it does make me think that we have waited much too long for this inclusion. Chapters on educational policy and research techniques are also included, and these topics represent further "newer areas for consideration".*

*So, there is much that is new in this book, and many teachers of sociology at A-level will be grateful for this. They will be able to integrate these newer elements into their teaching programmes.*

*There is more good news, though, because Trowler has chapters on race and ethnicity, social class and gender too. Such chapter titles are, of course, obligatory in a text on education and training, but a lot of the studies included are quite recent and this is a real bonus for teachers who want to introduce their students to ideas which have currency in today's Britain.*

*It is great to see up-to-date ideas and data about under-achievement and ethnic minorities rather than tired statistics from the early 80s. Equally, the chapter on social class really does address the question of social mobility in terms of what has happened in Britain recently, rather than getting bogged down in studies from the 60s and 70s. In the gender chapter, too, the myth of female under-achievement is tackled.*

*Trowler and his co-authors from the University of Central Lancashire have produced a book which clearly has the potential to increase students' knowledge about what is happening in schools and colleges but it should be noted that they encourage students to develop critical/evaluative skills too. This is absolutely crucial, given the requirements of examinations. As a further bonus, the text deals with points about sociological perspectives where appropriate, reinforcing student understanding of this difficult aspect of the syllabus.*

*There are sections of this book that A-level students will struggle with. The chapter on educational policy is rather dense, but then the ideas involved are complex. Teachers and students will have to work together closely on these difficult sections. But students will enjoy many of the activities which appear regularly in each chapter. A few activities seem to be impractical, but most should encourage productive group discussion.*

Moore, M. (1996) Times Educational Supplement, March 29, p. 32

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=109719>

## 12. Investigating the Media

*"This well designed and lavishly documented book certainly addresses a comprehensive and highly contemporary agenda...Its selection of statistical source material, concise argument and detailed illustration provides an impressive resource bank for individual study, group discussion and project work..I was impressed by the sheer density, thoroughness and breadth of material of offer in this book. "*

Grahame, J. (1989) Media Studies, 37, 52-3

## 13. Active Sociology: a student-centred approach

*"Abandoning his usual textbook approach, Trowler offers readings on the core topics of sociology. Each passage is followed by a glossary of difficult words plus a number of relevant*

questions. This is a welcome attempt to get students to think harder about what they are reading, and Trowler deserves congratulations for a thoughtful and enterprising scheme.[The book] should give good service to student and teacher alike. "

Alster, L. (1987) Times Educational Supplement, 11, 9, p 34

#### 14. Topics in Sociology

*"The appeal of this book is to a wider audience than that of A level students. It will be invaluable for professional courses containing sociology components, as well as undergraduate courses, in the opportunities provided for an expansion and deepening of an understanding of other sociological areas. "*

Russell, K. (1985) Secondary Education Journal, 15, 2, p 41.

#### 15. Review of Wicked Issues in Situating Theory in Close Up Research

*The papers in this Special Issue had their first outing at the 2010 Higher Education Close-Up 5 Conference in the UK. Exploring the thorny issue of theory-method relations can appear, in one sense to turn our gaze away from the pressing issues facing higher education; yet on the other hand, there is also a sense that higher education researchers need better schooling in theory-method relations in order to say something sensible about those very same issues. All the papers in this Special Issue make for provocative reading and I commend them all to you. However, my pick of the bunch is Paul Trowler's opening piece Wicked issues in situating theory in close-up research because it does such a first-class job describing the specific issues that haunt higher education researchers as they wrestle with scholarly decisions about research, theory and data – and their uneasy relations. In Trowler's piece, these elements are not at all straightforward. Theory is a wicked issue; its uses, functions and appearance in a research project can be contradictory, perhaps incommensurate; he encourages thoughtful questions about the expectations we have of theory and how we put it to work; and he asks how theory develops so we do not draw on the same old sources and traditions – just out of habit. I find questions like these troubling, exciting and puzzling because they are a source of energy that keeps the project of higher education research alive.*

HERDSA Journal [http://www.herdsa.org.au/?page\\_id=25](http://www.herdsa.org.au/?page_id=25)

#### 16. Further Topics in Sociology

*"...[A] well-known text is Paul Trowler's Topics in Sociology. His new book adds a comprehensive discussion of two further topics which he feels have been given little attention in introductory texts...They are the sociology of knowledge and questions of social policy and administration. In a subject where...rival theoretical ideas must be evaluated, students are often impatient for the application of these approaches in social policy. Paul Trowler acknowledges that 'Like much recent Marxist writing, functionalist work is so theoretical and general in nature that it is not very helpful in terms of practical policy proposals'. But he carefully teases out the policy implications of various sociological approaches."*

Ward, C. (1985) Times Educational Supplement, 13.9.85, p. 33.

#### 17. Topics in Sociology

*"The text utilises a conventional topic approach, thoughtfully supplemented by references to overlap areas within sociology. The chapter on Sociology of Development is particularly wide-ranging...The appeal of the book is to a wider audience than that of A level students. It will be invaluable for professional courses containing sociology components, as well as undergraduate courses, in the opportunities provided for an expansion and deepening of an understanding of other sociological areas."*

Russell, K. (1985) *Secondary Education Journal*, 15, 2, p. 41.

## 18. Investigating Education and Training

*"Reading the chapter on 'the sociology of education' in most standard textbooks for 'A' level you might think that research in this area stopped in the mid 1970's when Paul Willis' Learning to Labour and Bowles and Gintis' Schooling in Capitalist America were published. You might also come to believe that educational policy making stopped at around the same time. You would, of course, be wrong on both counts. Educational research and development has been vigorous since then and policy making in the area of education and (perhaps especially) training has undergone a revolution in both scale and substance. This book brings these developments to the attention of the non-specialist and those beginning the study of the sociology of education and training. The landscape is large and complex and our desire to paint an accessible picture of it has meant using a broad brush. Specialists will forgive us for this. The book uses a number of devices which may need explanation. They are: Concept boxes: These define important ideas and, sometimes, theories at or near the location in the text where they are used. Chapter Bibliographies: This section, at the end of each chapter, gives information to enable you to continue independent investigation of the particular aspect of education and training covered. These are often addresses of organisations, sources of information, and particularly useful books. Bibliography: To increase clarity, only minimal references to the names and dates of books and studies are made in the text. However full details are given in the bibliography at the end. Task Icons: Indicate whether a task is designed for an individual, pairs, small group or a whole class. These are suggestions only. The content of the book and the tasks around it put into practice a set of carefully researched educational principles based on findings from research on student learning. Authors such as N. Entwistle, P. Ramsden R. Saljo, F. Marton and D. Laurillard are among those best known for this work, which was centred around universities in Sweden, Lancaster and Edinburgh. More recently the C.N.A.A.'s Improving Student Learning Project based at the Centre for Staff Development at Oxford Polytechnic has worked on clearly identifying and spreading good practice in teaching and learning based on that earlier work. Essentially the research identified a number of different ways in which students went about the learning process. Some students were found to be effective learners in that their approach helped them develop a long lasting, structured and broad understanding of the material at hand and an ability to link it to other material. Other students adopted learning strategies which were less effective, resulting only in a relatively short-term memorising of facts in an unstructured and unconnected way. A number of 'learning pathologies' were also identified; traps into which the unwary student could fall. Among these are inappropriate use of 'operation learning' (learning in a serialist, stepwise way rather than a more holistic approach known as 'comprehension learning') and "improvidence"; the failure to use common principles or to give sufficient detail in explanation. Underlying all of this work are the concepts of deep and surface learning. Gibbs characterises the surface approach as follows: "The student reduces what is to be learnt to the*

status of unconnected facts to be memorised. The learning task is to reproduce the subject matter at a latter date (e.g. in an exam)".(Gibbs, 1990, p3) In taking a deep approach, on the other hand... "The student attempts to make sense of what is to be learnt, which consists of ideas and concepts. This involves thinking, seeking integration between components and between tasks, and 'playing' with ideas" (Gibbs, 1990, p3) The crucial point about the findings on students' different approaches to learning is that they are not fixed characteristics of the students themselves, rather they are strategies which tend to result from the organisation of the curriculum, of assessment techniques and of the way material is presented. In other words, individual students do not naturally or inevitably engage in poor (or good) learning strategies because of some basic feature they have as people. The same student may adopt surface approaches to learning in one subject and deep approaches to another. It is predominantly pedagogy, including the materials that support classroom practice, not psychology, that conditions learning strategy. The content and tasks in this book, then, apply some of the principles identified by this research as facilitating a deep approach to learning. Those principles, as identified by the Improving Student Learning Project are as follows: "1. Motivational Context Deep learning is more likely when students' motivation is intrinsic and when the student experiences a need to know something. ...[they] learn best what they need to learn in order to carry out tasks which matter to them... 2. Learner Activity Students need to be active rather than passive. Deep learning is associated with doing. If the learner is actively involved, then more connections will be made both with past learning and between new concepts. Doing is not sufficient for learning, however. Learning activity must be planned, reflected upon and processed, and related to abstract conceptions. 3. Interaction with others It is often easier to negotiate meaning and to manipulate ideas with others than alone. The importance of discussion [or 'exploratory talk'] for learning is not a new idea...and autonomous student groups and peer tutoring can be very effective... 4. A well structured knowledge base Without existing concepts it is impossible to make sense of new concepts. It is vital that students' existing knowledge and experience be brought to bear in learning. The subject matter being learnt must also be well structured and integrated..."

(Gibbs, 1990, p 9) References Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (1976) Schooling in Capitalist America Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. Gibbs, G. (1990) Improving Student Learning Project Briefing Paper Oxford Centre for Staff Development, Oxford. Willis, P. (1977) Learning to Labour Saxon House, Farnborough

"This is the first text directly aimed at the A-level sociology market which genuinely brings the sociology of education into the 1990s...Paul Trowler's book [rectifies the omission of a discussion of vocationalism in other texts] with great style and detail...In addition, we have a book which offers an insight into other aspects of the world of education and training that have largely been ignored in the standard texts...It is great to see up-to-date ideas and data about under-achievement and ethnic minorities rather than tired statistics from the early 80s...Trowler and his co-authors...have produced a book which clearly has the potential to increase students' knowledge about what is happening in schools and colleges but it should be noted that they encourage students to develop critical/evaluative skills too...As a further bonus, the text deals with points about sociological perspectives where appropriate, reinforcing student understanding of this difficult aspect of the syllabus."

Moore, M. (1996) Times Educational Supplement, March 29, p. 32.

19. Review of Think Piece for Keynote to Tomorrow's Sustainable Universities Conference. Bradford University, 15 July 2011.

### **At Last, Some Sense About Change**

*"A kind colleague, someone better read than me, pointed me to a recent [Thinkpiece](#) by Lancaster's Paul [Trowler](#). In it, are the points he made in a talk to leaders involved in a sustainable university initiative. He set out some tools for thinking and acting in ways which help increase the chances of effective and sustained curriculum change with a focus on strategic, large-scale changes in teaching and learning, and the curriculum.*

*Trowler began by arguing that common experiences of those set on change in universities include the following:*

- *internal embedded practices act and interact to erode reform*
- *structural processes are slow and internally contradictory: there is no institutional learning architecture and so structures are not fully joined-up*
- *decision-making, review and accountability processes are also non-aligned*
- *there is patchiness in delivery of core activities*
- *prioritisation doesn't happen, so that goals are multiple, unrealistic and frequently changing*
- *there are unformed, inappropriate and changing implementation strategies and tactics*
- *there is lots of talk, but little action, lots of strategic discussion, but business as usual*
- *there is often defence of 'turf' and fear of change*

*These are all, in effect, barriers to change. How refreshing, then, to find such an in-depth, and thoughtful analysis. I usually have two tests of such statements:*

*1. Is it generic?*

*2. Does it have validity – particularly [ecological](#) validity?*

*And you hope that the answers are No – Yes. In other words, [1] could it apply to anything, anywhere? For example you often find the following cited as barriers: "There isn't time. Anyway, we haven't been trained". These are often true, but utterly irrelevant as there's no evidence that the offer of more time and training would make any difference. And [2] Is it obviously about the context being discussed and does it reflect "real life conditions"?*

*The mere text of Trowler's analysis doesn't lead, for me, to an unequivocal No – Yes response. However, 30+ years in HE, much of it change-focused, suggests that this is a valid analysis, and one that those engaged in sustainability-focused change might well heed.*

*Paul Trowler goes on to argue that, for leaders of change, all this can lead to some very common experiences:*

- *only the 'usual suspects' are engaged with the reform, others quietly withdraw or actively oppose change*
- *there is slow acceleration to a plateau and then entropy sets in*
- *turf wars and other squabbles result in stalled initiatives*
- *there are difficulties in scaling up and the short-termism of 'projectitis': reform stopping as funding ends*

*Sadly, all this rings horribly true. To learn what Trowler thinks are appropriate "tools for thinking and acting" follow from all this, the Thinkpiece is only a [click](#) away."*

Bill Scott (2011) <http://blogs.bath.ac.uk/edswahs/2011/07/08/at-last-some-sense-about-change/>