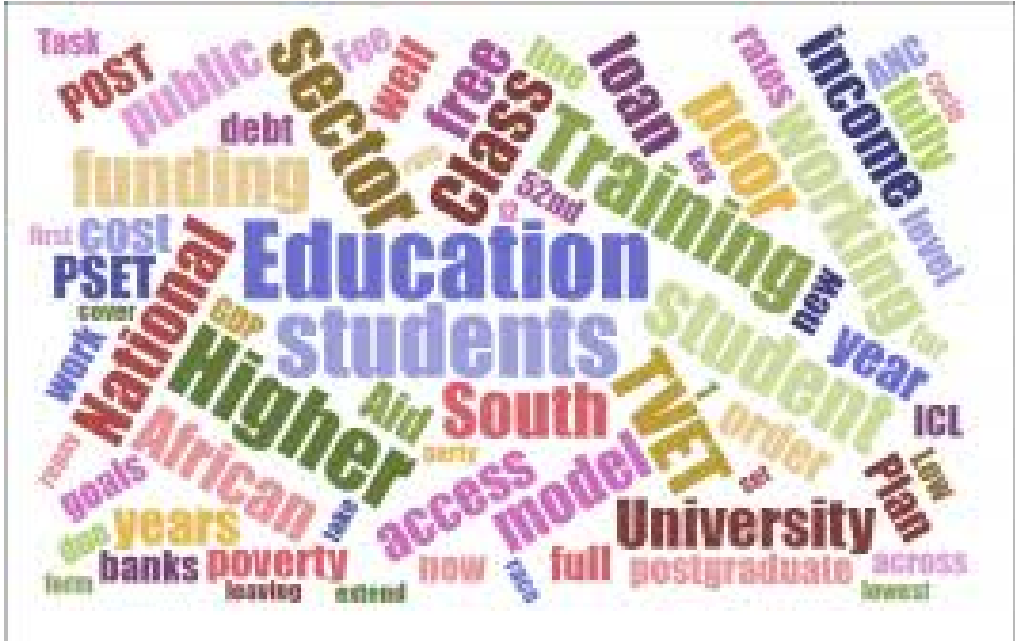


# A PERFECT STORM? STUDENT DISRUPTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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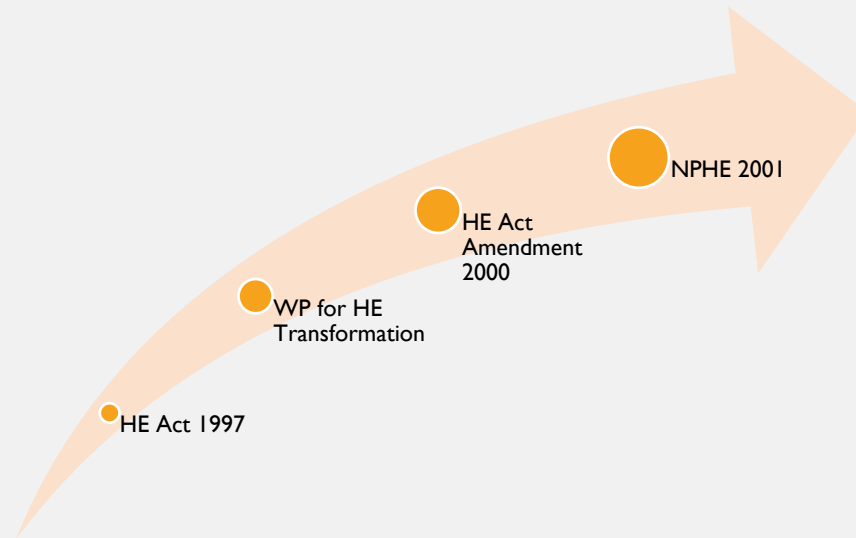




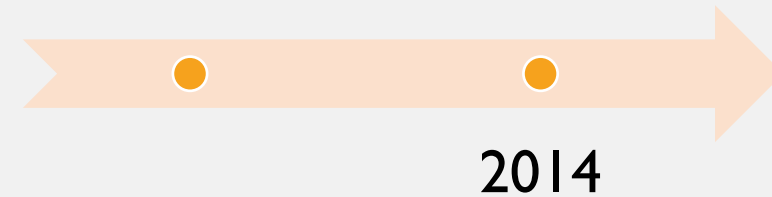


# WALKING DOWN MEMORY LANE

## REFLECTION ON HE POLICY



## IMPACT OF POLICY 2000



- 402 041 to 969 154
- NFSAS 20%
- Direct Govt Funding decline 2.4 times



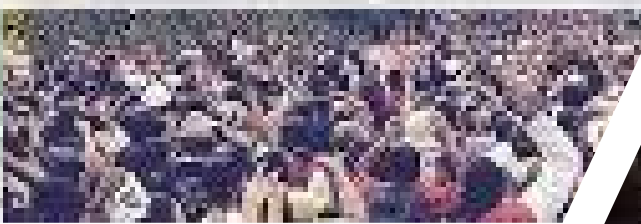
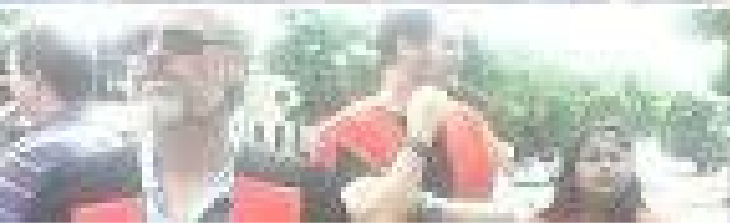




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Democratise Higher Education N



# A PERFECT STORM?

A perfect storm: an especially bad situation caused by a combination of unfavourable circumstances



What did we know about the growing student discontent that signalled the tipping point/potential problems? (Institutional research, who sets the agenda?)



When and how did we know it? (Timeframe and dissemination)



What did we do with that knowledge? (Uptake)



Who sets the agenda for such research? Is it undertaken to address these HE challenges?

## FRAMEWORK



Disruption/discontinuity/change



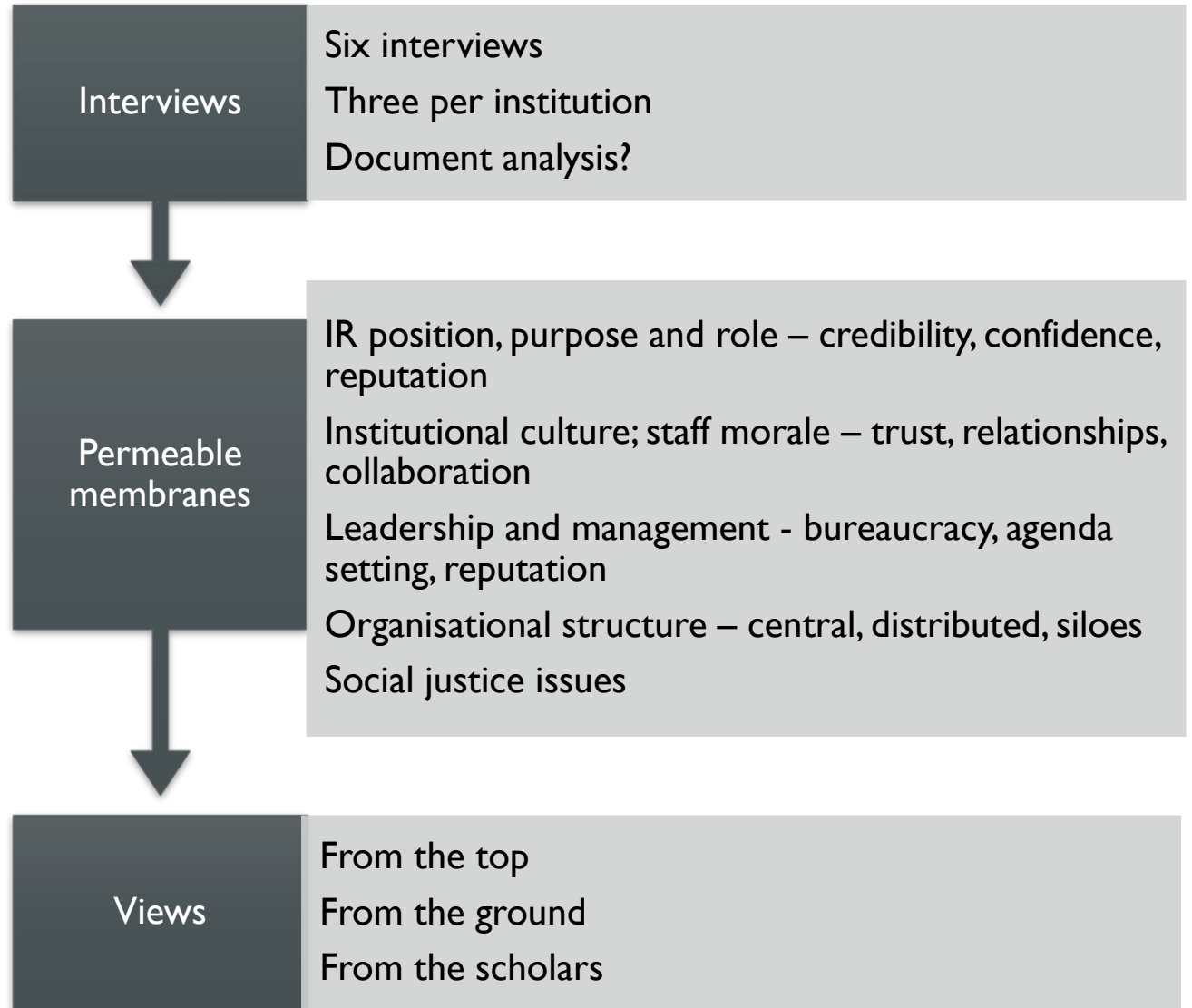
Epigenetic change



University leadership/university  
readiness for change



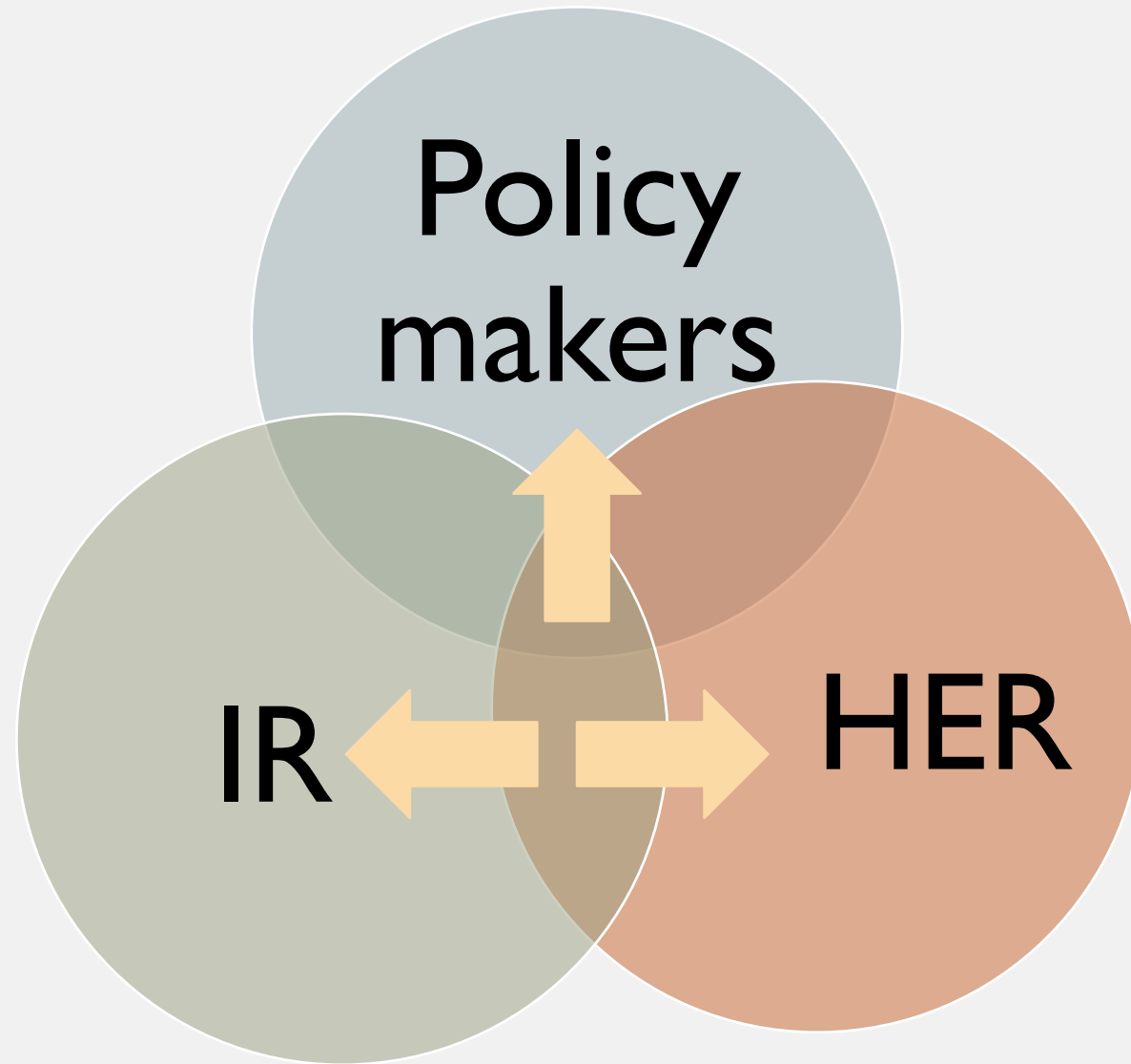
# CASE STUDY



# CASE STUDY

## CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY INSTITUTIONS







## VIEW FROM THE TOP

“That’s where institutional research falls, at the moment. It’s very much within the context of an in-house thing here, where people are doing other things. Extending themselves.”

“We’re not some fancy university with 20 people sitting around.”

“But, you may very well find, that an academic is far better placed to understand his or her students, than someone just parachuting into this thing from outside.”

“So, it’s not in the purview of someone sitting at a desk controlling it through that sort of research. Indirectly, even when someone sits and spends too much time on trying to synthesise and analyse. It may be outdated by the time they produce it.”

“So, this disruption was not as disruptive. It was well known to us that this is a catastrophe in the making. Simply because if I tell you we talked about it, this university. I told many people that.”

“No, not really. Not in that sense. And try to find a solution. I mean, the closest that we have responded to things was the Hefer Commission. We went to the Commission. We gave our input when they came here. In that sense.”

## VIEW FROM THE TOP

“...if you for instance want to do research in education, then you go through this long, protracted process of, you know, you have to have a topic, you have to write a hundred page research proposal, you have to show that you know that there's ... you're quoting this theory and that theory and that theory. And at the end of the day you go and defend that to a bunch of traditionalists who maybe does not think out of the box and thinks that education has marched on. There's technology and other influences that have totally changed the way people learn etc.”

“But as I've said, because our student population and the diversity of our student population and demographics in the background are such that most of our students - I would say until five years ago - most of our students were coming from reasonably affluent schools, there were never really problems of students paying their fees. We've been tracking fee payments for some time.”

“...not explicitly, because we have done institutional research. I mean, our Institutional Research Unit was most probably one of the strongest in the sector, I would say, and most well-capacitated in the sector.

The Institutional Research Unit, certainly until I took it over five years ago, or when they started reporting to me, I think they were doing a lot of work. A lot of what could be considered as institution research, whether it's first year experience surveys; graduate entry surveys; graduate exit surveys; both graduate surveys. So there was a whole host of surveys being done.”

## VIEW FROM ACADEMIA

I think that universities have got a very strong self-preservation kind of agenda, as well. An agenda which says, which moves or shifts the universities back to the status quo as quickly as you try to set a new agenda. And it happens without us knowing. You can't place a finger on it and say, this one and that one are the culprits, you know, it doesn't happen that way. But the university, inevitably, always goes back to the status quo.

“our bosses up in the tower, where you, you know... They will insist, but you need to publish, guys, and so on and so forth. But I don't think the research we do really matters to them. I think what really matters to them is how much money the university's going to be receiving as subsidy from government. That's what matters for them. And I think it's evidenced by the fact that, as an institution, there doesn't seem to be any direct interest in organising people around discussions, dialogues, you know, and so on, and so forth.”

“I think, perhaps, saying there's no interest is probably a little too harsh. I think, you know, people might be interested but they just don't have the time. They've got time for other things like counting how many, how many outputs are being produced by this school and therefore generating those numbers into Rands and knowing how much they're going to be producing in the coming years.”



## VIEW FROM THE GROUND

we used to sit on a daily basis after hours trying to interrogate data. And he used to ask difficult questions: If the student was here in the previous year, why is the student not coming back the following year? So we had to go and track the student and say: All these students are here. They were not in the final year of study. They should have been back this year. I used to go back and see: Are they academically excluded? Are they financially excluded? If no, then somebody needs to be contacting the student to ask them for a reason why they didn't come back. So we created like a call centre, where we actually phoned students.

The lack of executive management foresight with regard to having that kind of information available. If executive management foresaw that information was critical and crucial, more money could have been spent and said: Okay, develop those areas there and have the necessary tools and infrastructure to have that in place.

So is there any kind of structure or process whereby we know that this data, this information is being used, that it becomes knowledge. And that it is used in the university to inform planning, to inform improvements, to inform decision-making. Is there evidence of that kind of uptake of this knowledge that's generated?

"I don't think we are there yet. I think suggestion is like I said to have a repository but it must be on a shared portal. You can have it up there so the information is available to everybody. And we just need to have it be documented and every staff member be made aware that all this was done"

## VIEW FROM THE GROUND

“The ad-hoc projects, what I mean by that is that, from time to time, management will be interested in a specific area that concerns them. They will say, we need to have scientific evidence in terms of advising us how to go about dealing with this particular issue. And that also, I think, has also to do with the Fees Must Fall. Because, after that, when we are looking at our feeder school data, we see that in 2016 there's been this decline. 2017 there's been this decline, in terms of the number of students from top performing high schools coming to...”

“Now, what we have done, we have now incorporated the issue of the Fees Must Fall protests. Especially in terms of the reputation of the university. Because we know that Wits, in particular, was the most affected one. So, now, that question is now part of all those studies to be able to see... I think, now, we're just going to go back to see, retrospectively, the impact of the protests.”

“...we did a meta-analysis of almost all of our major surveys. And, I can tell you that the issues which are important now, that come up now. Those were the issues which were there in the last four or three years. Then, the question comes to the issue of, what happens to those recommendations? And to those findings? Because, clearly, as the IR unit, you do the synthesis. The analysis. And, then, you find that this is a typical area. And I am sure that, with all of those studies which were done before, there could have been indications that there is a problem with regards to the Fees Must Fall. But, now, the question is. Whoever who was supposed to take responsibility in terms of the executive. Did they act? And, I think, no they didn't act.”

# ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Structures/Committees/Politics  
Selectively permeable



High knowledge concentration

**HER/IR**

Low knowledge concentration

**Executives**