

# Towards rethinking research on quality in higher education

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# The meaning of quality in HE



Knight & Trowler 2000 **Type 1**

**Type 2**

Harvey, Knight & SRHE 1996

# Exploring Type 2 meaning of quality

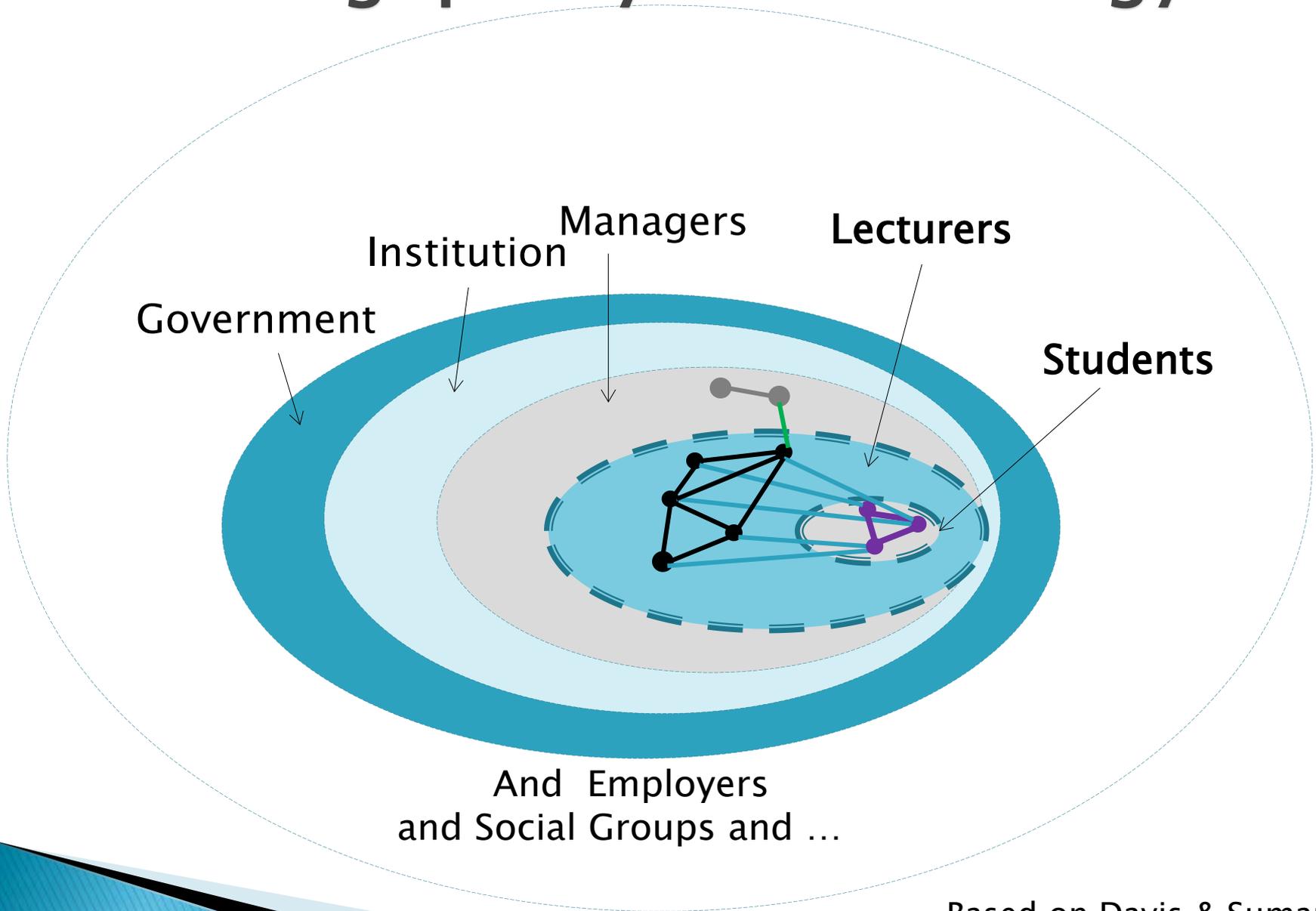
- ▶ **Wicked, not simple, problem** (Krause 2012)
- ▶ **Consider the purpose of education** (Biesta 2009)
  - Development & enhancement
- ▶ **Transformation**
  - **Complexity thinking** (Davis & Sumara 2006; Mason 2008)
  - ‘Liminal space’ metaphor (Land *et al*/2014)



Transformation



# Researching quality in HE: strategy



Based on Davis & Sumara (2006); Haggis (2008).

<b>Sensitising concept (lens)</b>	<b>Description of lens for example of researching quality in undergraduate science education</b>
<b>Problem definition lens</b>	Problems with ‘quality’, for example, the reasons for difficulty in defining quality in undergraduate science education.
<b>Openness lens</b>	Quality as boundary hopping, for example, openness to interactions from the outside, far from equilibrium.
<b>Social complexity lens</b>	Quality as relationship: interactions between science lecturers and between science lecturers and others.
<b>Nonlinearity lens</b>	Quality as change: lecturers changing through multiple non-linear local interactions.
<b>Multiple ‘causality’ lens</b>	Quality as influence: the goals and concerns of, and influences on, science lecturers.
<b>Problem resolution and emergence of quality lens</b>	Findings about quality: strategies/proposals for science lecturers to engage with the problem.

# Example:

## Undergraduate science education

### Problem definition lens

- Lecturers use different teaching approaches in same course
  - each defines quality differently [assumes each believes he/she is doing a 'quality' job]
  - individual factors play a role in definition of quality
- **Resulting questions to ask for future improvement**
  - Do lecturers consider what they do 'quality'?
  - Consider:
    - meaning of quality for individual lecturers
    - personal background: culture, work experience, teaching qualifications, gender etc

# Example:

## Undergraduate science education

### Social complexity lens

- ▶ Interactions vary greatly:
  - Lecturer A – undergrad & postgrad students
  - Lecturer B, C – their research groups
  - Few interactions between lecturers
  - Few interactions between lecturers & managers
- ▶ Lack of interaction between lecturers within and beyond discipline
- ▶ Resulting questions to ask for future improvement
  - How do lecturers think interactions with other lecturers, within their discipline and in other science disciplines, could enhance quality?
  - How could these interactions be encouraged?

# Summary of findings

- ▶ 6 lenses applied to the lecturer community – one part of the whole contributing to quality in undergraduate science education
- ▶ 5 process lenses focus on conditions conducive to emergence of quality as transformation – findings expressed as future research questions
- ▶ 6<sup>th</sup> lens – problem resolution & emergence of quality – a synthesis & proposal for future improvement:

“How can you encourage and extend your interactions so that they help improve science education in the future?”

# Conclusions

- ▶ Complexity, wickedity & transformation combined via sensitising concepts to research quality in HE
- ▶ Example of researching quality in undergraduate science education
- ▶ Findings focus on future improvement

## ❖ Discussion question

How could this strategy apply to researching teaching or other research in your institution/environment?