

Universities as Specific and Incomplete Organisations? New Theories of ,Universities as Organisations'.

Presentation at the 4th International Conference „University Traditions: A Resource or a Burden?“ Higher School of Economics, Moscow 26 to 28 September 2013.

Prof. Dr. Barbara M. Kehm
Barbara.Kehm@glasgow.ac.uk

Structure

1. Introduction
2. From Being an Institution to
Becoming an Organisation
3. New Theoretical Approaches
4. Basic Paradigms
5. Concluding Thoughts: Strengths,
Weaknesses, Open Questions

1. Introduction

The spread of the concept of governance (often in connection with NPM) aims to achieve a double transformation:

a) Higher education institutions are supposed to develop into more strongly integrated organisations and to present themselves as (quasi autonomous) actors.

b) By increasing the competition among higher education institutions quasi-markets are established and performance is supposed to improve.

With these measures higher education institutions are supposedly enabled to react better and more flexibly to societal and economic needs.

2. From Being an Institution to Becoming an Organisation

Institution: a system of rules and regulations with normative validity
There are formal and non-formal institutions.

Organisation: Groups of people following a shared goal, cooperation on the basis of a division of labour, hierarchical coordination

Why are universities supposed to become organisations?

- More flexibility (management by objectives)
- Diversified funding (incl. private sources)
- Profile building and competition
- New modes of coordination between higher education, the state, and society;
- Influence of supra-national organisations
- The role of universities for the knowledge society

3. New Theoretical Approaches

(a) Universities as „specific organisations“

(Musselin 2007)

Organisational specificities of universities are (a) a loose coupling of organisational units and (b) unclear technologies in teaching and learning (i.e. no causal relationship between tasks and results).

Typical (hierarchical) management practices derived from organisational concepts taught in business administration don't work.

(b) Universities as „incomplete organisations“

(Brunsson, Sahlin-Andersson 2000)

Lack of hierarchy, identity, and rationality.

But: Strengthening of university leadership (hierarchy), profile building and branding (identity), more efficiency and effectiveness in internal decision-making processes through weakening collegial self-governance (rationality).

Open question: At which degree of hierarchy, identity, and rationality does the shift from an „incomplete“ to a „complete“ organisation happen?

(c) Universities as „managed organisations“

(Rhoades 1998)

Incompatibility of management cultures and academic cultures (in the USA).

The more professionalised the management becomes, the higher the loss of self-regulation capacity and job satisfaction among the academic profession.

Corporatization of the university as an indicator for ‚academic capitalism‘.

(d) Universities as „actors“

(Meier 2009)

Actor status as a goal of organisational reforms. Precondition: more institutional autonomy. But in exchange for more accountability.

Research has shown that the effects of organisational reforms are smaller than expected.

There are beginnings of an organisational actor model due to increased competition.

But: Universities remain ‚specific organisations‘.

(e) Universities as „penetrated hierarchies“

(Bleiklie 2010)

Increased interaction of universities with their environment,
inclusion of external stakeholders in organisational leadership
and decision-making, network activities.

These lead again to looser coupling and anarchic decision-making
and thus counteract hierarchical integration.

No coherent model of organisation.

4. Basic Paradigms

Project group analysing the transformation of universities in Europe (TRUE): 3 hypotheses

- (a) Universalist perspective: lose internal coupling necessary for good performance (Musselin 2007)
- (b) Instrumentalist perspective: development towards more complete and formal organisations (Brunsson, Sahlin-Andersson 2000)
- (c) Institutional perspective: characteristic features are constituted through norms and values (Olsen 2007)

Substrate of theoretical work which started in the framework of the HELF Project (Ferlie, Musselin, Andresani 2008).

Three „grand narratives“ (Lyotard)

(1) New Public Management narrative:

Market, efficiency, monitoring of performance, etc.;
organisational economics, principal-agent theory.

(2) Network governance narrative:

Decentralisation, lateral forms of management,
interdependence of network partners, strategic
alliances.

(3) Neo-Weberian narrative:

Democratic re-vitalisation, modernisation, professionalisation
of public services, decentralisation.

5. Concluding Thoughts: Strengths, Weaknesses, Open Questions

Approaches coming from the theory of organisations are located in a field of tension between rational choice theories and institutionalist/neo-institutionalist theories.

The change towards becoming an organisation is confronted with the persistence of the institution (hybrid models?).

Interdisciplinary approaches are better than approaches based solely on organisational theory.

What is a ‚normal‘ model of organisation? Would this fit the university? And what other models are there?

Recent research as shown that universities adapt to the new circumstances in a superficial way but traditional norms and values continue to determine the action of actors.

The university becoming an organisation cannot be analysed theoretically without taking into consideration the effects on the academic profession.

Theories of action and theories of organisation are brought together in the framework of actor centred institutionalism.

Becoming an organisation also requires shared goals which are not expressed by the profile of the university alone but all members of the organisation need to identify with them.

So far we do not know yet what form of management will be needed to achieve this.

Thank you for your attention !