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## **The Dean in the University of the Future**

### **Challenge for an Academic Conference**

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Initial statement for the International Academic  
Conference "The Dean in the University of the Future.  
Learning From and Progressing With Each Other",  
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## 1. The Pressure<sup>\*</sup>

Within the last decade and on a worldwide scope, higher education was affected by major reforms. In the course of challenges such as financial deficits and international convergence pressure, higher education should be made more efficient and effective. Therefore, constantly recurring reforms mainly resulted in structural transformations. As a secondary effect, they provoked new problems and increased existing obstacles. Mapping the problem areas of contemporary universities, two prevalent topics can be identified:

### External: Political, social, and cultural pressure

Starting within public administration in the early 1990s, reforms under the umbrella of “New Public Management” (*Aucoin* 1990; *Hood* 1991) were initiated in order to increase performance through the implementation of competition and management (*Schimank* 2005; *Santiago/Carvalho* 2008; *Bogumil/Heinze* 2009) and to deliver services to different social – and taxpaying – stakeholders such as adults and elderly, employees and employers. Spilling over to universities, new definitions of legitimate and illegitimate organizational goals (*Hüther* 2010) affected self-conception, mission, strategies, and the overall image of universities.

This development forced universities to develop new objectives such as fulfillment of demands instead of innovation seen as self purpose, but also new competencies in order to adequately cope with the claims of internal and external stakeholders. In particular, a dynamic sampling of university competencies is needed to keep up with national and international, with “real” and “internet-based” competitors in the field of higher education.

This leads to the need of organizational learning of dynamic capabilities (*Teece et al.* 1997; *Eisenhart/Martin* 2000) in order to establish efficiency and effective performance, in particular in higher education institutions (*Fumasoli/Lepori* 2011). In the end, the **traditional** model of universities which follows Humboldt’s ideas is in danger to be completely replaced by a **corporate** model of universities which follows the rationale of corporations – with the open question whether the underlying corporate framework is from the 1980s or from the 2010s. Consequently, the

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identity of universities is shifted as well, reflecting cultural changes in self-conception.

### **Internal: Strategic, structural, and organizational pressure**

This problem area concerns the structural field, in particular the position of faculties<sup>1</sup> as the core organizational units of universities. Within universities, two opposing principles can be found on the way of structural change with respect to university governance (Scholz/Stein 2011).

- One principle is the corporate model of universities with a strong control of the president<sup>2</sup>. While public financial resources are allocated to universities as global budgets, only the president is entitled to make decisions in a completely centralized structure. He<sup>3</sup> counteracts individual optimization strategies of individual professors by increasing his own decision-making power to the disadvantage of the autonomy of faculties and professors. The underlying normative principle is the hierarchical mode of governance which is that of private business (**corporatization**). Based on formal law as well as on the shift in the policy paradigm towards central planning, the president can decide on the whole range of university and faculty matters, including overall strategy, election of deans, appointment of professors, budget allocation, or additional pay. At the same time, the role of deans is characterized as recipient of orders, having to execute the decisions of the president within their faculties.
- The other principle is the collegial approach which revives subsidiarity, decentralization, and participative bottom-up management (**collegialization**). It reflects that tasks and problems within a university are carried out by groups of professors in a cooperative way. This democratic structure tries to strengthen academic freedom and competition of the professors as part of a faculty. Faculties are becoming the main organizational units within universities, providing services for the professors, while the president is in charge of attracting funds and endowments for the university and concentrates on external representation, and the

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<sup>1</sup> If we are talking about a *division* within a university, we will take “faculty” (headed by a “dean” and including “college”, “school”, “department”). If we are talking about *people*, we will take “staff”, “faculty members” or “professors”.

<sup>2</sup> This wording includes rectors, vice-chancellors, CEOs, etc.

<sup>3</sup> The masculine gender will be used throughout the article to assist with readability; it is of course also meant to include women.

role of the dean is limited to implementing the decisions of the academic staff.

Putting this together, it becomes obvious that the first problem area can be located on the macro level of higher education, whereas the second problem area has to be located on the micro level of universities. Developments on the macro level shape developments on the micro level, while the micro level itself, additionally, follows a path with own internal dynamics.

## 2. The International Context

On a worldwide scale, systems of higher education differ very much, as international comparisons show (e.g., *Paradeise/Reale/Goastellec* 2009). We perceive that national university systems<sup>4</sup> can be located in different developmental stages of corporatization. While for example the Australian, New Zealand, and U.S. universities are far ahead with the application of New Public Management reforms (e.g., *Christensen* 2011, 503) that are supposed to reflect “modern management principles”, Japanese (e.g., *Yamamoto* 2004), Latin American, African (e.g., *Waswa/Swaleh* 2012), and Dutch universities are on the way and German universities are still close to the starting point.

The condition of faculties can serve as a useful indicator for the maturation level of a national university system. It is fascinating to compare faculties around the globe which are run in different ways. It is an empirical task to relate the autonomy of the different systems to their performance, their effectiveness, and overall competitiveness.

Given the international competition in higher education, it seems reasonable to depart from the idea of international convergence and assimilation of university systems for two reasons: First, the situational factors differ from country to country, and second, competitive advantages can only be achieved if different systems compete. However, today's prevalent management rationale still pushes university systems internationally into the same direction of centralistic governance (e.g., *Kamola/Meyerhoff* 2009). Interestingly, the underlying concept of that is the corporation of the 1980s – the centralized, departmental, regulated company with a strong top-down management. The related problem is complexity: The more players and the more links between them, the more

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<sup>4</sup> This contribution concentrates on public universities.

complex the system and the less appropriate a centralistic leadership (e.g., *Birnbaum* 1988, 198-199).

Taking different national systems of higher education together, they represent a system of benchmarks in which different intensities of university corporatization can be assessed. Especially in international dialogs, faculties and deans will be able to learn from their different experiences.

### **3. The Faculty as Playground**

It is not only that the system of higher education is facing turbulent times; moreover, it seems that it has entered a critical phase. The future of higher education, of the universities as we know them today, but also of the people who are responsible for innovative research and excellent teaching, is uncertain.

Interestingly, there are a lot of “players” involved in the macro system of higher education: ministries which give the budgets, donators who give endowments, companies who are willing to cooperate or to instrumentalize universities for their purposes, consultants who have discovered universities as a profitable business area, professional associations which fight for the interests of their members.

**This situation must be characterized as outsider’s interventionism.**

As if that were not enough, in the university micro system, there are even more “players”: the president is interested in power, the administration has to find its position between service and cost efficiency, the staff is supposed to do the work, and the students are customers to the system, even though “students as customers” is already a paradigm to be disputed in detail.

**In any case: The faculties are caught in the middle.**

Consisting of academic staff (such as professors, associate professors, assistant professors, research assistants, lecturers) and administrative staff, faculties can be seen as university divisions being responsible for academic research and teaching. Usually, they are headed by a dean who is supported by a management team made of vice deans, some parliament-like structures as the faculty council, and the faculty administration. Most faculties include more than one department.

Although they are often not the prevalent players itself, faculties are the areas where opposing interests are clashing. Faculties have to pay for decisions taken by others:

- They must **adopt** in teaching and research to every new reform imposed on them – even if acceptance for the system changes is missing.
- They must **provide** themselves external funds – even if resources such as money for new requirements and time for the complex workload are missing.
- They must **create** service for new stakeholders such as corporations or accreditation agencies – even if sense and directedness to faculty goals are missing.
- They must **execute** orders of faculty outsiders and abandon own decision rights – even if this contradicts the purpose of faculty autonomy.
- They must **motivate** faculty members – even if all structural changes strongly contribute to the demotivation of the academic staff.

It can be observed that players outside of the faculty tend to even increase the problems for faculties. They are for example installing new service units with decision power which are dependent on the president, they are imposing time-consuming bureaucracy and accreditation efforts on faculties (*Amaral/Magalhães 2004*), they are implementing new systems of control, or they are shifting financial resources to central administration.

Translated into organization theory, university structures are to be seen as the result of a wide and complex sphere, designed by stakeholders such as educational politicians, professional associations, or companies: “In fact, not only do the professionals control their own work, but they also seek collective control of the administrative decisions that affect them – decisions, for example, to hire colleagues, to promote them, and to distribute resources. Controlling these decisions requires control of the middle line of organization, which professionals do by ensuring that it is staffed with ‘their own’. Some of the administrative work the operating professionals do themselves. [...] Moreover, full-time administrators who wish to have any power at all in these structures must be certified

members of the profession and preferably be elected by the professional operators or at least appointed with their blessing. What emerges therefore, is a rather democratic administrative structure" (*Mintzberg 1983, 197*).

This **professional bureaucracy** (*Mintzberg 1983, 189*) can be found in faculties as the "natural" structure of a university, characterized by democracy and decentralization. Professors are the operating core of the university, the faculties are their democratically institutionalized organizational frame, and the deans are their heads.

Given the directedness by outsiders on the one hand and the alternative option of a decentralized, autonomous faculty on the other hand, faculties have reached a crossroads, not knowing who will have enough commitment and engagement to do the core work of faculties in the future – serving the students and being innovative. Therefore, what will be necessary for faculty survival and sustainability and what will be necessary for improvement of the faculty's contribution to the overall system of higher education?

#### 4. The Historical Evolution

Before answering these questions, it has to be stated that we are not dealing with "the faculty". Beside of national differences, there is also a historical process going on: The evolutionary process of structural change leads to different stages of faculty development and therefore different types of faculties. The stages – but not effectiveness of the different national systems of higher education – are widely country-independent since they describe a sequential pattern derived from basic organization theory on the dynamics of intrasystem change (e.g., *Greiner 1972*).

A stage model of faculty evolution describes six archetypical developmental stages of university governance (*Scholz/Stein 2010; 2011*):

**Faculty Silos** depicts the situation where faculties as the core organisational units of the traditional university are divided along professional boundaries. Independently providing research and teaching, they fulfill their tasks according to the standards developed by their respective scientific community. The president of a university – an academic – plays a rather weak role; his managerial tasks are more or less restricted to representation. Centralized service units provide services to the faculties. The relationship between faculties and university top management is based on partnership and not on formal to-down-

authority. Professors have relatively high academic autonomy which is supposed to bring creativity and to open up an appropriate scope of action to succeed within the competition for scientific reputation (*Reichwald 1997, 7; Kern 2000, 29*).

**Academic Kindergarten** is the structural degeneration of “Faculty Silos”, sketching the relationship of the university with individual professors who are opportunistic, with opportunism defined as self-interest oriented individual behavior without taking third party implications into account (*Williamson 1975*). Some professors, left to themselves and not being compelled into loyalty, begin to seek their own advantages, in particular financial resources, staff, and prestige. Free access to a broad range of university services favors free-rider behavior of individual university members (*Wilkesmann 2011, 305-306*), coming along with a deficit of the individual professors’ accountability.

**Presidential Feudalism** reflects the corporatization model of universities. The university president is the key player who decides on everything which affects the future of the university. His completely centralized structure helps him to interfere in the remotest corners of the university. He counteracts individual optimization strategies of individual professors by increasing his own decision-making power to the disadvantage of the autonomy of faculties and professors who have only minor voice in the university.

**Individual Negotiation Jungle** is the structural degeneration of “Presidential Feudalism”. Professors who got rid of a great amount of their individual autonomy as well of faculty autonomy start to adapt to their new role and increase their negotiation capacity focused on extrinsic motivation. Since the professors only have one negotiation partner left – the president –, they will all see him with every single problem: They will ask for moral support, more research money, higher salaries, new target agreements, bonuses, incentives, etc. The logical consequence is that the president’s negotiation capacity will be sooner or later exceeded. System complexity will lead to a system overload. The collapse of the whole university system has to be taken into account as a realistic possibility. The president’s authority decreases because he faces hundreds of well-trained negotiation partners. Faculties become obsolete, since each professor negotiates his working conditions opportunistically even at the expense of the faculty’s interests and the interests of his colleagues. University effectiveness and efficiency become a zero-sum-game among all university members.



**University Collegialism** reflects that tasks and problems within a university are carried out by groups of professors in a cooperative way. This democratic structure resembles “Faculty Silos” but, in order to resolve its negative results, introduces new elements. Collegialism – understood as the translation of the German term “Korporatismus” – follows a normative principle shaped by academic freedom and competition. On the one hand, professors regain full autonomy. They decide according to the principle of collegiality on the services portfolio provided by their university. On the other hand, professors become accountable for their decisions. They are responsible for meeting the demands of stakeholders and, therefore, take the risk of failing. The accountability of professors is supposed to lead to their participation in working groups in order to deliver excellent research and teaching. Faculties are strengthened as service providers for the professors with deans being responsible for the implementation of the decisions of the academic staff. The influence of the president, however, is reduced to external representation and fundraising.

**Dean Steering** is the structural degeneration of “University Collegialism”. Deans turn out to behave opportunistically, taking advantage of the withdrawn role of the president as well of the professors who got sidetracked by coordination efforts. They develop their own agenda, pleading the faculty’s interests, and behave within the faculty as feudalistic as the president in the stage of “Presidential Feudalism”.

These stages differ in regard to the distribution of power within the university and result in different extents of effectiveness and efficiency.

## 5. The Complex Role of a Dean

The changing role of deans in the complex and conflicting political interests and in the structural evolution of higher education and universities is more and more discussed in international literature on university governance. There are a growing number of comprehensive overviews (e.g., *Wolverton et al.* 2001; *Bray* 2008; *de Boer/Goedegebuure* 2009; *Gmelch/Hopkins/Damico* 2011; *Scholz/Stein/Fraune* 2012) about this topic.

Leading a faculty is an activity that mediates between the **interests of the professors** and the **interests of the university management**.

While intending to bridge this gap, it becomes the crucial question on which side the dean sees himself: on the side of the professors who are

the key unit for the production of academic output, or on the side of powerful presidential university management? Both tend to have different and often conflicting views on the relevance of external university stakeholders such as companies and their influence on research and teaching contents. The dean's role strongly influences the degree of academic autonomy of the professors and the degree of decision power of the university president.

Two alternative models for the dean position can be observed:

- There are **collegial** deans who are elected by the faculty members for a limited period of time. They are academics and not specifically trained for the dean's job except for having prior experience in how universities work from internal faculty and university politics in committees, councils or the senate, and they know that they are in a "primus inter pares" role compared to their colleagues.
- Alternatively, there are professional full-time **executive** deans who usually are installed by the president and serve as the president's messenger. Being an executive dean means to tell the faculty completely what to do in order to conform to the president's will.

Both are responsible for faculty performance and sustainable development. Therefore, they have to be professionalized. A collegial dean is not naturally qualified because he is already a professor in the university system. He has for example to train managerial competences as well as negotiation skills, has to learn about the faculty and university system, and has to understand all numbers and indicators he will be dealing with. An executive dean has even more to learn. He is not automatically the better type of dean because he is from the outside and a non-academic. On the contrary, it might be highly dysfunctional if an over-the-hill company manager tries to turn into a university specialist without knowing system and culture.

The role of the dean is also shaped by the determination process. Collegial deans are elected by their peers, while executive deans are selected by the president or – a bit more concealed – elected by their peers but not installed against the will of the president who has the final veto power. Dependent on their determination, deans will later behave according to their psychological contract they have concluded.

## 6. The Dean's Scope of Action

Facing very complex configurations of interrelated interests which are additionally moderated by academic discipline (*Del Favero* 2006), the dean's main managerial challenge is how to meet the different demands. In their international comparison of the most important areas of a dean's work, *Scott/Coates/Anderson* (2008) identify for academic deans in Australian universities a task list ranked by perceived priority. It consists of "managing relationships with senior staff – strategic planning – identifying new opportunities – managing other staff – developing policy – chairing meetings – networking within the university – participating in meetings – liaising with external constituents – developing organizational processes". This task list does not only show the different domains such as planning, policy development, networking, management, and administration (*Scott/Coates/Anderson* 2008), but does also reveal that between 2008 and today, the task list could be even extended.

Giving the dean's role a conception which is stronger oriented at political domains, a dean has to reflect his activities on five fields:

(1) **Strategy of deans and faculties:** In which direction can deans influence the development of faculties within the university of the future? This domain includes for example:

- Overall identity of a faculty
- Formulation of a faculty strategy
- Dean's accountability for academic freedom in research and teaching

(2) **Management of faculties and deans' competence profiles:** Which management tasks should a dean institutionalize and which competences should he acquire in order to build a faculty with competitive strengths? This domain includes for example:

- Training requirements for deans
- Interface optimization between dean and president
- Transparency between dean and faculty members

(3) **Faculty autonomy:** Which significance will the autonomy of faculties have in the university of the future? This domain includes for example:

- Decision-making principles within the faculty
- Power in the budget negotiation
- Administrative independence of the faculty

(4) **External relations of faculties:** Which external relations of a faculty can and should a dean shape in the university of the future? This domain includes for example:

- Autonomy in respect to firm cooperation
- Independence of horizontal cooperation among faculties
- Faculty internationalization strategy

(5) **Performance controlling of faculties:** How will a dean be able to direct and control the performance of a faculty member as well as of the whole faculty in future competition in higher education? This domain includes for example:

- Significance of rankings, accreditations, and evaluations
- Weight of performance indicators
- Overall model of university governance

These five fields each include the most important and relevant instruments of higher education policies (*Reale/Seeber* 2013). Deans are responsible for the implementation of their ideas regarding faculty management. Although their influence on professors, presidents, administration, and external stakeholders is restricted, they still have some room for manoeuvre to influence faculty management and performance. They can find activity fields for example in respect to faculty strategy development, faculty funding, faculty leadership, faculty administration, and faculty information systems.

Without stressing all above points in detail (see *Scholz/Stein/Fraune* 2012), a dean can follow the “executive” model with authority or the “collegial” model with loyalty towards the faculty members. The formal power of the dean is decisive for his effectiveness, i.e. whether he will be able to successfully formulate the comprehensive strategy for the faculty, create motivating working conditions including material resources as well as immaterial support, shape the faculty’s internal relations among its members, and negotiate the faculty’s external relations with other faculties and all stakeholders. The cooperative fulfillment of all these tasks requires a dean’s capabilities in negotiation, creativity and innovation, as well as in strategic planning in higher education (*Zechlin* 2010), but foremost an interest in working towards the faculty’s objectives rather than towards individual goals.

## 7. The Discussion Ahead

It emerges that – especially in international competition in higher education – the way to shape faculties will be decisive for the sustainability of the university in the future. To sum up the focal questions:

**How should a dean influence the faculty so that it can be internationally competitive in research and teaching? Which type of dean should he be?**

These questions will shape the most important discussion lines of the international academic conference “The Dean in the University of the Future: Learning From and Progressing With Each Other”.

The scope of discussion will range between conventional strategies and alternative strategies. While conventional action focuses on centralization, the alternative way could be decentralization or (in the terminology of the university system) collegialism and academic autonomy. What does that mean for faculties?

Applying **conventional strategies** could – related to the five fields presented in paragraph 3 – exemplarily mean to take the following moves:

- (1) Strategy of deans and faculties: to serve the university’s performance criteria such as maximization of external funds;
- (2) Management of faculties and deans’ competence profiles: to train deans to be effectively performing faculty heads in the eyes of the president;
- (3) Faculty autonomy: to support centralized service units in order to generate synergies;
- (4) External relations of faculties: to implement cooperation with companies which are politically relevant for the university;
- (5) Performance controlling of faculties: to optimize the system of key performance indicators for faculty-directed control and president-directed reporting.

Modern organization theory, however, has developed organizational alternatives, structurally based on federal concepts such as lean management, delegation, flexibilization, or virtualization. Increasing complexity is met by an increase of decentralized problem solution capacity. Linking again action to the five fields presented in paragraph 3, examples for **alternative strategies** could be found in:

- (1) Strategy of deans and faculties: to restore the ideal of a university as a location of unbiased innovation instead of obedient performance;

- (2) Management of faculties and deans' competence profiles: to involve the faculties in the economization discussion and let them decide autonomously about their contributions to save financial resources;
- (3) Faculty autonomy: to empower faculties so that they can directly negotiate their budgets with the public ministries;
- (4) External relations of faculties: to create inter-faculty cooperation without involving the president as "process owner";
- (5) Performance controlling of faculties: to release faculties from non-productive tasks such as permanent accreditation.

The discussions about the future of universities which are necessary will be difficult and partly controversial. But first of all, it will be decisive to be precise in what is meant. New insight cannot be derived when there is only common agreement on the surface but below there is vagueness with room for every possible interpretation.

**Faculties might less be the "problem" but the "solution" to university sustainability and effectiveness.**

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