The Organisation of Higher Education Institutions in Theory and Practice

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Umstrittene Reform in Bayern

Die Hochschulen sollen „agiler, exzellenter und innovativer“ werden

Nach quälend langer Debatte legt die bayerische Staatsregierung ein neues Hochschulgesetz vor. Viel soll sich ändern – aber die Gremienstruktur bleibt.

Von TIMO FRASCH, MÜNCHEN



„Universities to be more agile, excellent and innovative“

Changing political agendas: From excellence and competition to transfer and impact

…Die Hochschulen sollen nicht mehr nur auf Forschung und Lehre verpflichtet werden, sondern müssen künftig auch verstärkt den „Transfer“ der Forschung in die konkrete Anwendung in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft leisten; dieser wird zur „Dienstaufgabe“ der Professoren. Sie sollen, wie auch die Studenten, zu Gründern etwa von Start-ups werden…

Universities are no longer limited to their core tasks in research and higher education. Instead they must achieve more with regard to the transfer of findings into economic and societal application of research outcomes. Transfer will be an official job-related task for professors. They are supposed to become entrepreneurs and founders of start-up businesses.

Shift of power: Internal Structures

…Die massivste Kritik entzündete sich jedoch am Vorhaben (…), den Universitäten selbst zu überlassen, wie sie ihre „interne Governance“ gestalten. Faktisch hätte das zu einer weiteren Machtverschiebung zugunsten der Hochschulleitungen geführt…

Most heavily, the idea to leave the decision about internal governance structures with the universities was criticised. Actually, this would have led to further shifts of power in favour of the Rectorates.

Shift of power: flows of decision making and ownership

…Das Berufungsrecht soll verstärkt auf Exzellenz ausgerichtet werden. Das bedeutet, dass Koryphäen in einem vereinfachten „Fast-Track“-Verfahren ohne Ausschreibung berufen werden können. Das ist dann Sache des Präsidenten und des zuständigen Dekans, der Fakultätsrat muss dann lediglich sein Einverständnis geben.

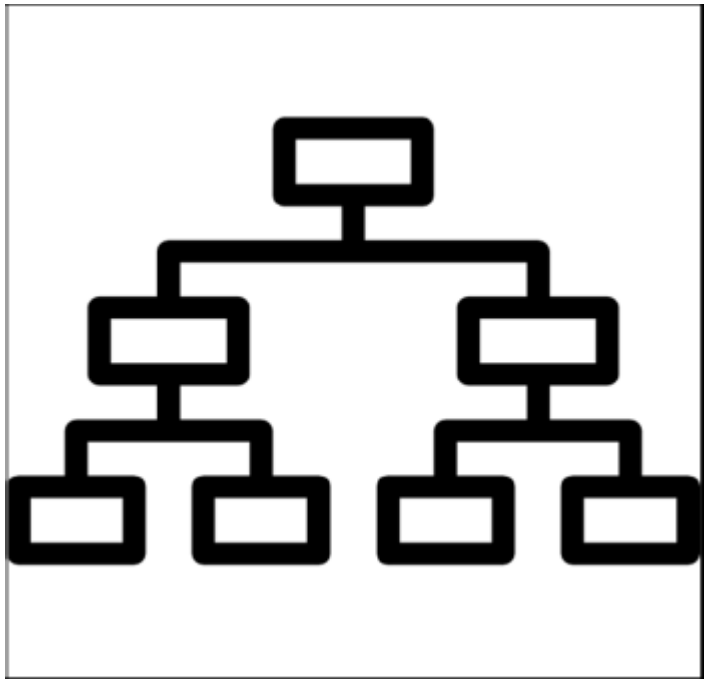
Professors can be appointed through a simplified fast track procedure which lies with the Rector and the Dean in charge, the faculty board only gives its approval.

What lines of conflict?

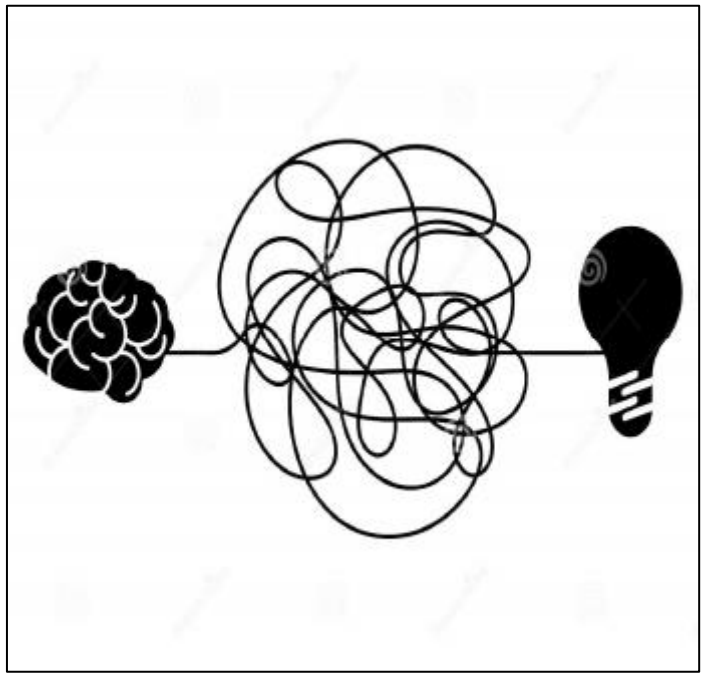
- Cultural values and self-images: High degree of autonomy and self government at lower managerial levels
- Association rather with the global academic community than with the university: obligation to pursue organisational aims??
- Requests to pursue activities outside science (e.g., transfer): compromising academic freedom

=> Complex organisational, institutional, cultural arrangements of a university need to be analysed which is where organisational theory comes into play

What type of organisation is the university?

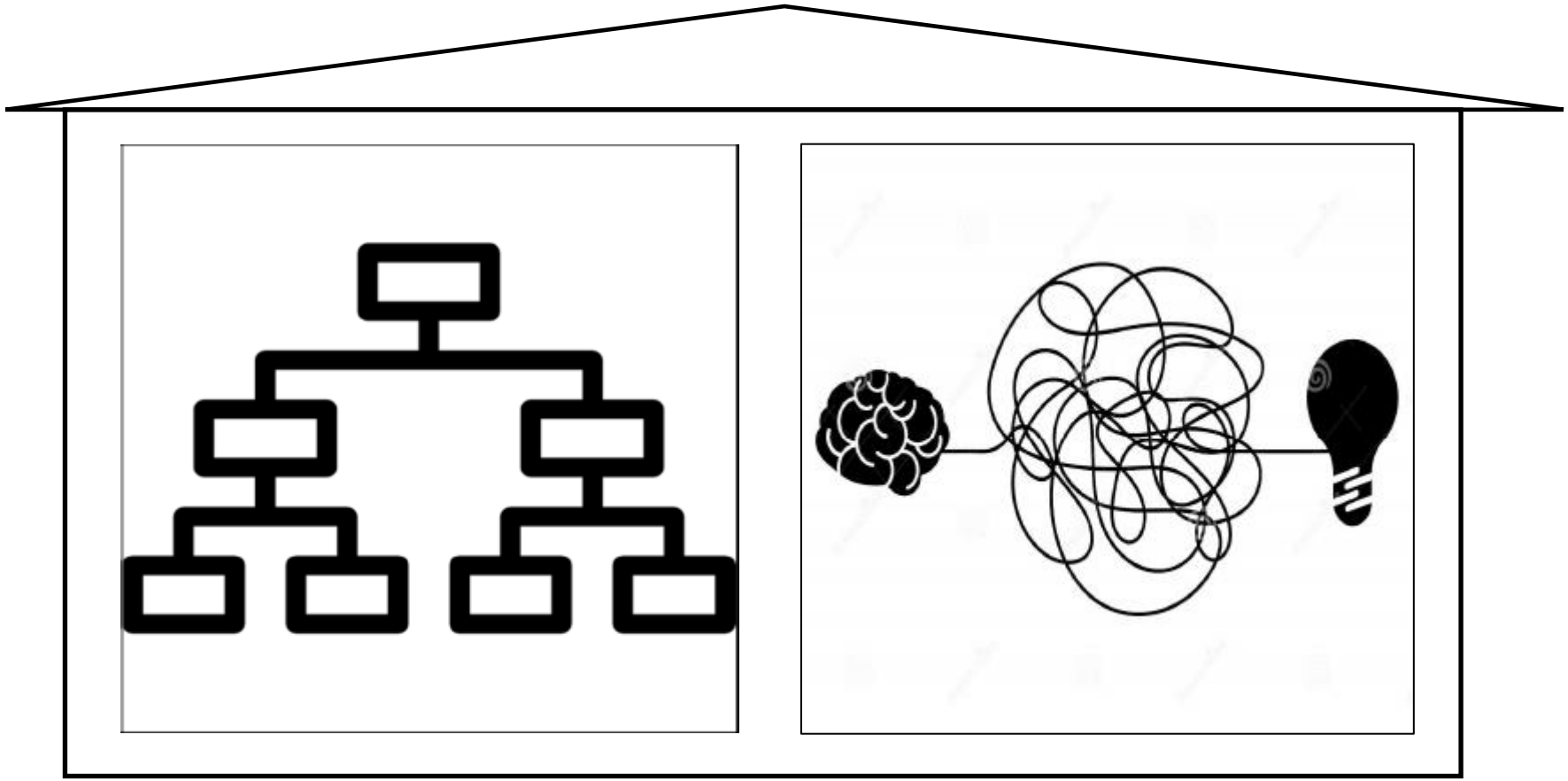


Organisational = operational structure



Operational =/= organisational structure.
Informal rules, institutional values

What type of organisation is a university?



Metaphors from organisational theory



- **Universities are**
  - Organised anarchies
  - Losely coupled systems
  - Garbage can organisations
  - Multiversities
  - Expert organisations
  - Incomplete organisations
  - …

Examples for theory-led assumptions

- Universities act in accordance with **external expectations** in order to maintain legitimacy and acceptance.
- Legitimacy and acceptance are the central precondition for the organisation‘s survival. Yet, **internal goals** might be differing from external expectations.
- Thus, organisations tend to **institutionalise tasks** in order to demonstrate to their external environment the attainment of societally accepted goals.
- Principle-agent paradox: In order to control for actual achievements, authorities introduce fine-grained **control instruments**.

Spotlight on: Quality Assurance

- Almost every university has QA mechanisms. Universities even copy models for QA (“isomorphism“) regardless of their actual appropriateness.
- However, is there any proof that thanks to QA mechanisms, the quality has increased over time…?
- The mere existence of QA is sufficient to signal that the university is pursuing accepted societal goals (=> maintenance of acceptance).
- The external quality control mechanisms have become more and more detailed over time, irrespective of *university autonomy* as a guiding principle of policy.
- Universities develop subtle mechanisms to bypass external control mechanisms (principle-agent paradox)

What could be done…

- …if these assumptions and observations hold true?
  - Build a work atmosphere which is trustful and failure tolerant
  - Leave more decisions to local levels of expertise
  - Move to a management paradigm that is evidence-based and trust-based
  - Set up quality assurance as institutional research (´learning labs‘, etc.)
  - What is the benefit for individual scholars of participating and of pursuing organisational goals?

Thanks for listening

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