Higher education organization and management: reflections from research

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Ongoing projects

StARS, Strategic Action and Response Strategies in a Changing Swedish Higher Education Landscape (Riksbankens jubileumsfond)
http://anslag.rj.se/sv/anslag/48831

Effects of changes in leadership and management structures in Nordic higher education (Norwegian Research Council)
http://uia.no/finnut

PERFA, Performance-based governance in academia: professional practices and identities in transformation (Riksbankens jubileumsfond, Vetenskapsrådet, Forte and Formas) http://anslag.rj.se/sv/anslag/50847
What characterizes the Swedish system?

Balance world-class research with high quality education at all levels (emphasis depending on government)

A unified system with large diversity

Increased formal autonomy since 1993

Evaluation systems and performance based funding growing in importance

Stable financial situation: big increase in research funding (in particular the last 10 years)
Swedish research funding (billion SEK)
Academic positions 2004-2014 (UKÄ 2016)
The University as an organization

or

Is the university an organization?
Some classical works

Problematic goals, unclear technology and fluid participation (March & Olsen 1974)

Loosely coupled organizations (Weick 1976)

Bottom-heavy organizations (Clark 1983)

Academic tribes and territories (Becher 1989)

A rule-governed community of scholars (Nybom 1997)
The University as a mix of different institutional logics ("the Clark triangle")
Universities are changing…
Actors and influencers

- Supra national actors
- Global market
- National/regional market
- Academic oligarchy
- University management
- State actors
University dilemmas (Olsen 2007)

- Unity of Action vs. Individual Freedom (autonomy)
- Unity of Purpose vs. Multiple Identities & Accounts (goals & functions)
- Being Seduced vs. Abandoned? (resource dependencies)
- Self-Renewal vs. Continuity (path-dependencies; identity)
Who is in charge?

**Line management:** Head of unit, Head of department, Head of school, President, Board

**Collegial leadership:** Faculty council, education committee, research committee, employment committee, local collegium

**Education:** Director of studies, course director, programme director

**Research:** Research leader, project leader, research coordinator, professors, supervisors
Who is in charge? (2)

"Google scholar is my boss"

(Assistant professor, Technical university)
Who is in charge? (3)
## What gets measured gets done. Or does it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic duty</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Key actor</th>
<th>Possible outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall performance</td>
<td>Annual salary appraisal, promotion criteria</td>
<td>Line manager, collegial bodies</td>
<td>Salary increase, career progression</td>
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<td>Research</td>
<td>Publications, External grants</td>
<td>Peer reviewers, funding bodies</td>
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<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Student reviews, course analyses</td>
<td>Students, Programme manager, colleagues</td>
<td>Students learn, complete their studies</td>
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<td>3rd task, service</td>
<td>Impact, internally/externally</td>
<td>External stakeholder, colleagues</td>
<td>Funding, learning, visibility</td>
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I worry that the KPI-driven impact culture increasingly means that careful, meticulous and incremental science is anathema in the academy, especially for those at the early stages of their careers. There are many who are so attracted by the prospect of success that they are willing to obfuscate, mystify and perhaps falsify research to game the system and reap the plentiful rewards.

Anonymous academic, The Guardian, 16 Feb 2018
Key findings from an Nordic study of leadership and performance

Denmark most negative, high levels of mistrust and dissatisfaction

Sweden the most positive, control and evaluation considered (relatively) legitimate tasks

Higher pressure on research, more recognised than teaching

The publication "credits" system developed in the other countries deeply affect individual researchers’ strategies and behaviour

External funding plays a big role in particular in Sweden, but growing also in other countries (except Norway)
Legitimizing change

External factors related to quality, competitiveness and compliance to reforms main rationales

Perceived rationales also include internal factors, such as financial reasons, personal issues and career ambitions for managers

The important role of history and traditions for resisting or enabling change
Academic staff’s perspective

Interviews with 19 tenure track academics at a Swedish university

Tenure track system does not reduce stress. Applying for grants huge stress factor

The challenge being a ”jack of all trades” (a decathlete)

Dependent on vertical and horizontal relations but still lonely. Be a leader but also a team player

Researchers off tenure track dissatisfaction
Implications for academic leaders and staff

A world of coopetitors

Many eager to lead but not be led

Job satisfaction – academics love their tasks but not the organizational aspects

Enable but also be able to say no and make priorities
Thank you for your attention

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