Re-inventing shared governance – implications for culture and identity

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The social contract and the governance of higher education

• An issue of trust…
  - The message of «Modernization» - HE-performance and effectiveness should be increased
  - «Modernizing governance» – historical forms of governance in HE are slow, incremental in nature, and not very responsive to societal needs
Forms of governance have changed.

- More external representatives in supervisory and governance boards
- Increased institutional autonomy (wrt. legal status, organization, resource-allocation, etc)
- Although demands for «more flexible governance and funding systems» are still on the agenda (EU-Commission, 2011)
How can we interpret the changes taking place in HE-governance?

• Advocates of change: governance is an instrument for accomplishing more lean and strategic universities – change is needed to preserve the public trust in universities

• Critics of change: governance is part of the culture and identity of higher education – change may transform universities into a different form of institution
The core problem: shared governance

- «Shared governance» not easily defined due to difficulties of linking the concept to specific governance arrangements
- The general understanding: academics should be involved in decision-making…
  - But how should they be involved?
  - And what actors should be involved in the «sharing»?
1) The traditional collegial model

- Academic involved in all matters/academic matters
- Academic influence is secured through legislation or dependent on culture and informal arrangements
- Decision «sharing» takes place mostly among the academic staff
2) The university democracy model

- The «democratic revolution of universities»
- Affected interest should have the right to elect representatives and should be eligible for decision-making bodies
- Decision «sharing» included not only junior academic staff, but also students and administration
3) The corporate enterprise model

- There is a need for strong external representation/stakeholder interest
- Not all affected interest should have an equal influence in the decision-making process
- Reducing the number of decision-making bodies, and making more explicit the responsibilities and duties of those left
4) The entrepreneurial model

- The need for more dynamic governance arrangements
- Partners, networks and customers should be included in the governance arrangements
- Leadership is essential for forming alliances, networks, and coalitions for change, and leaders should decide how «sharing» takes place
Which is the most effective model?

- Hard to identify particular characteristics of effective «shared decision-making», but studies indicate that
  - Academics can make «hard» decisions
  - Structural factors is perhaps less important than we tend to believe (centralization/de-centralization, board size, allocation of power)
  - The decision-making process is important for the outcome
How do modern universities think of their future governance arrangements?

• Focusing on the universities of Helsinki, Uppsala, Lund, Copenhagen, Oslo, and their strategic plans
  - the selected institutions have long traditions for «shared governance» arrangements
  - but are also current hothouses for the new knowledge economy emphasising innovation and entrepreneurship
Similar challenges and development paths in the Nordic region?

- How should institutions emphasizing academic freedom, independent thinking, critical reflections, high ethical and democratic standards - change…?
  - Excellence
  - Competition
  - Multi-disciplinarity
  - Staff recruitment/HRM
  - Internationalization
How do they perceive the role of governance in the change process?

• «...enthusiastic participation of a large number of staff and students in drafting this strategic plan»..(Helsinki)

• «..led to joint agreement...providing the whole university with a ´shared purpose´» (Uppsala)

• None of the universities acknowledge that the ability to change as an organization may be a challenge
How is change expected to take place in the universities?

• Indications of the collegial model, the corporate enterprise model, and the university democracy model are all found in the strategic plans.

• The entrepreneurial model seems to be the dominant option, underlined by the need for:
  - «Communicative leadership» (Lund)
  - «Interactive leadership» (Helsinki)
  - «Better leadership» (Oslo)
How is change expected to take place in the universities cont.

- All universities underline that:
  - A new type of leadership is required, along with new «instruments» (payment, personell policies)
  - There is a need for systematic leadership training
  - The leadership is given extensive responsibility for creating trust in the strategic change processes ahead
Re-invented shared governance: possible implications (1)

- Is the leadership challenge to make decisions, or to make «good» decisions? (cf. The current interest in risk management)
  - how to secure enactment of options, and stimulate to creativity prior to formal decisions?
- A possible paradox: the old collegial model as a form of «risk-management» arrangement...
Re-invented shared governance: possible implications (2)

• Is the new leadership the only ones that need «training and competence building»?
  - addressing the sometimes isolationalist, secretive and defensive characteristics of collegial decision-making…

• A possible paradox: the possible downsides of collegialism handled by the tools of collegialism (social integration, academic work and responsibilities)
Re-invented shared governance: possible implications (3)

• The double accountability demands for the new leadership…
  - How to achieve a balance between speed and efficiency and trust and engagement?

• A possible paradox: The need for a new «social contract» for the «autonomous» leadership?
Epilogue…

«Shared governance is more than ever required, but in new and adapted forms»
(Burton Clark 2004: 176)