Effects of Quality Management in Higher Education Institutions
A SW(OT) Analysis of Selected Study Cases

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Research Questions and Goals

- **Which intended, desirable and non-intended effects of QM and 'system accreditation'** occur?

- **Which effects** does **QM** have on HEIs' **autonomy, competitiveness and accountability**?

- Which major **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats** of the QMS and 'system accreditation' occur in sample universities? – choice of results from two qualitative case studies

Methodology and Sources of Data and Information

- Collaborative project on "QM and system accreditation",
  see http://systemakkreditierung-bw.hs-furtwangen.de/

- Expert (insider) knowledge (years of observation, monitoring and developing of QMSs; audits of QM; system accreditation)

- Document analysis

- Structured interviews on the role and importance of performance-based governance in HEIs; mission statements in HEIs; rankings in HEIs; outputs/outcomes of 'system accreditation'

- Methodological limitations:

  Only some interviews explicitly dedicated to impact analysis of 'system accreditation'; all output and outcome analysis after major steps of 'system accreditation' (*ex post*);

  Exploratory qualitative case study: no strict impact analysis (before-after; panel). rather process observation and "workshop report" character (limited resources; currently no large motivation for more investment because of low expectation of more detailed potential findings and interviewees' saturation)
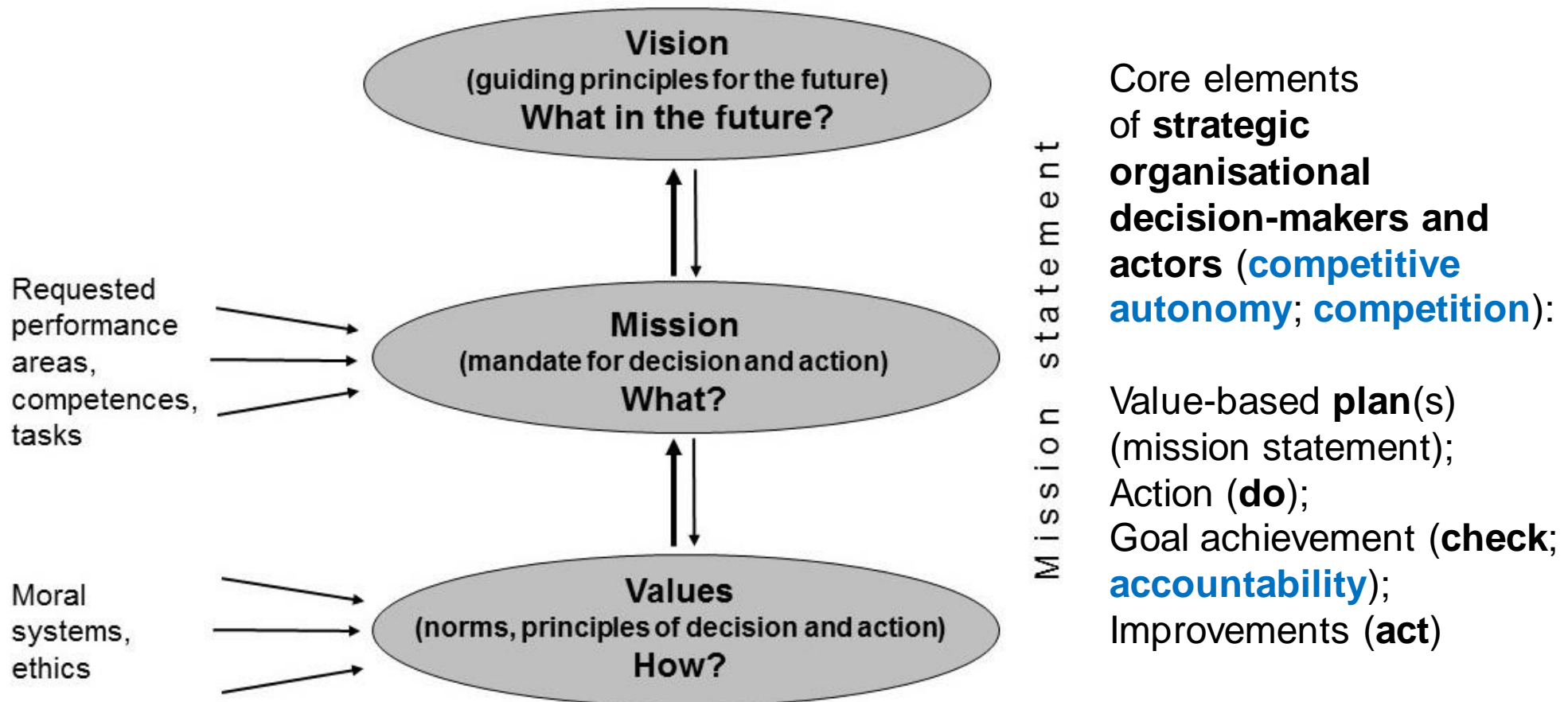
- **Characteristics of 'specific organisations'** (cf. Cohen et al. 1972; 1976; Musselin 2007)

  - ➤ **Functional loose coupling** of both **learning and teaching** activities and **research** activities

    - – Low level of coordination and cooperation in L&T and research activities (in particular intra-university) – subject-specific, department-specific, different individual autonomy profiles

  - ➤ But seems **necessary to make coupling 'less loose'** because of **arguable** (though case-dependent) **requirements** for **L&T as joint task**; **inter- and transdisciplinary** study programs and curricula; ECTS-based **mobility**; **research-related L&T**; etc. → some **governance-based coordination and cooperation required**

  - ➤ Both **learning and teaching** and **research** are **unclear technologies**

    - – **L&T and research are complex processes which are difficult to grasp**, partly because of **intrinsic** reasons (it is complex), partly because of **construction** (academics maintain opacity and academic work is still not sufficently studied)

    - – In particular, **causal relationships** between tasks and results **are ambigious (distributed multiple causation, and partially opaque learning processes and teaching processes)**

  - ➤ Seems **desirable to avoid constructed part of unclear technologies** (e.g., by intensified **didactic and pedagogical research** based on evidences of L&T processes)

  - ➤ **Fluid participation**, i.e., shifting involvement in decision making

  - ➤ But seems **necessary to make participation 'less fluid'** because of **arguable requirements** of **more systematic and integrative self-governance / autonomy** → more **decisional rationality required**

- **Governance** model of HEIs as 'specific organisations' (Musselin 2007) comprises the dimensions of **accountability**, **competition** and **autonomy**

  - ➤ **HEIs** can become/are **strategic decision-makers & organisational actors** incl. **quality development** on the basis of an **organisational identity** (QM serves responsible self-governance)

  - ➤ An **organisational identity** (an institution's self-understanding) is developed by **implementing** interwoven features/ abilities of **accountability** (**responsibility**)**, competition** and **autonomy** (by definition); it is characterised by reasons why the institution exists and what its (general) goals are (*mission*); how it strives for its goals and what its values are as a basis of decision-making and action-taking (*values*); and, finally, where the institution hopes these purposes will lead and what it wants to be or become in the future (*vision*) (Leiber 2016; Kosmützky & Krücken 2015)

  - ➤ Thus, **organisational identity** seems to be **indispensable for** definition and systematic **development of organisational quality** which is **implemented** *via* **quality management** (based on values, mission, vision; accreditation, evaluation, …) in **cooperative, collective, networked societal enterprises** such as HEIs which are responsible, competitive and self-reliant players in complex societies (here: competition for academics, students, research projects and funds etc. in an era of international and global competition of research, welfare, economies, mass-higher education ...)

Quality Management as a Key to University Governance: The Interplay of Accountability, Competition and Autonomy

Core elements of **strategic organisational decision-makers and actors** (**competitive autonomy**; **competition**):

Value-based **plan**(s) (mission statement);
Action (**do**);
Goal achievement (**check**; **accountability**);
Improvements (**act**)

(cf. Leiber 2016a)

- **Dimensions of QM models in HEIs**

  - **Quality assessment methods, scope & functionality/ intensity**

    Which monitoring systems, reporting systems, performance indicators are used? What is the relation of used qualitative and quantitative indicators? How are results interpreted? How are reference standards built? Which performance areas, key processes, support processes are included in QMS? What is the degree of interweaving and interaction of QM measures with university processes? How are informal and formal instruments and processes used? In what way are follow-up measures implemented?

  - **Institutional anchoring**

    On which organisational levels, through which bodies, by which individuals is the QMS implemented? Who is responsible for QM? How heterogeneous is QM?

  - **Embedding of QM in strategy building & governance mode**

    What is the degree of embeddedness of QM measures/ instruments in the university's strategy formation? How are QM goals coupled to the strategic development of the HEI? How are the results/ effects of QM used in university (governance)?

Two Case Studies: Furtwangen University of Applied Sciences (HFU) and Media University Stuttgart (HdM)

- **Methods, scope & functionality/ intensity of QM –** choice of **strengths**

  – As a consequence of system accreditation, **formerly loosely coupled or uncoupled QA instruments** (e.g., conducting surveys such as course evaluations or graduate surveys; course-related statistics) **are now connected** in a (more) consistent, slim and functional QMS in L&T

  – **Enhancement of interlinkage between QM measures and HEI processes** (strong focus on L&T) (e.g., since 2014 central instruments and QA procedures are software based: FINQUAS system checks whether strategic objectives are interlinked at all levels of HEI and whether the Study Examination Regulations, qualifications and module descriptions are consistent)

  – **More regular interaction** (interfaculty WSs, QM Board, WGs, rotation of bodies)

  – **Increase of networked thinking** of academic staff/ employees, in particular Rectorate and deanary, and thus better understanding of structural and process quality of academic staff/ employees (e.g., course is embedded in study program concept, influence of new study programs (controlled curriculum development) on old study program in the faculty (e.g., impulses on further development, such as adapting Study Examinations Regulations or study program structure)

- **Methods, scope & functionality/ intensity of QM –** choice of **strengths**
  - **Effectiveness and acceptance of dialogue-oriented evaluation formats** in the context of 'Implementation of study programs' and 'development of programs'

- **Methods, scope & functionality/ intensity of QM –** choice of **weaknesses**
  - **Continuous improvement of individual instruments is often not implemented** in detail yet (definition of further quantitative PIs, e.g., for Further Education, not yet implemented; optimization of process handling necessary, e.g., *via* further development of FINQUAS system, process course evaluation)
  - **No fully integrated QMS** (integration of research, technology and knowledge transfer and administration is largely **missing**
  - **Compilation of statistical data so far incomplete and not automatised**

Evidence-Related Key Results: Effects of Quality Management on University Governance

- **Institutional anchoring of QM –** choice of **strengths**
  - **Improvement of communication and interaction** (e.g., new WGs, strategy WS between rectorate and central units; new: strategy conferences of rectorate/ faculties/ programs; more regular: study commission)
  - **Integration of bottom-up and top-down impulses** (e.g., bottom-up: QM Board, sometimes strong initiatives in/from the faculties (topic-dependent))

- **Institutional anchoring of QM –** choice of **weaknesses**
  - **Decentralized/ distributed QM approach as a challenge** (e.g., dangers of loose coupling, opaque responsibility, dominance of informal institutionalisation)
  - Distributed (and not strongly formalized) QM approach includes (strong) **dependence on (voluntary) commitment and responsibility of parties and participants**

Evidence-Related Key Results: Effects of Quality Management on University Governance

- **Embedding of QM in strategy building & governance mode –** choice of **strenghts**

  - Different **initiatives for governance decisions** (e.g., top-down: initiative of the rector: convening of a Senate Committee for the restructuring of a faculty area (starting point: poor candidate numbers), continuation of the initiative by the dean: convening of a faculty commission to continue the work of the Senate Committee;
  bottom up: e.g. initiative of deanery for quality development process for strategic realignment/ redirection of faculty)

- **Embedding of QM in strategy building & governance mode –** choice of **weaknesses**
    - **University-wide strategic planning**, **definition of goals**, **interlinking** and **operationalization of strategic objectives** still flawed, **incomplete**, upgradeable
        - **Decoupling of strategy and its implementation in practice**
            - **Anchoring of QM values in mission statement and SDP only vague**
            - **No deduction of quality strategy from SDP**
            - **Governance decisions are often still neither formalized nor evidence-based**
        - **(Degree of achievement of) Strategic objectives** on HEI, department and program levels **and their achievements are poorly or not at all evaluated**
    - In the context of operationalisation of HEI goals by faculties, administration and central units, **definition and monitoring of measures** *via* **performance indicators** including **goal values**, **measuring instruments** and **magnitudes is not planned or just partly planned in L&T**

- **Major intended desirable effects** (**strengths**) of QM & 'system accreditation'
  - **Autonomy/ responsibility enhancement**
    - Building of the HEI's ability to assure and improve quality in L&T
    - Establishing an individual, HEI-specific QMS
    - Carry out QM (in L&T) under own authority
    - Increase of involvement of HEI members in QM
    - Improved relationship with the ministry (e.g., easier permission of newly introduced programs, no concept accreditation required)
    - Enhanced independence from external agencies (e.g., no program accreditation required)
  - **Reputation enhancement**
    - Visibility enhancement of HEI (regional; national; international; towards research partners, funders, parents, …)
    - Guaranteeing accreditation of study programs
  - **Accountability/ responsibility enhancement**
    - Assuring accountability towards HE politics and funders with respect to program accreditation

- **Major intended desirable effects (strengths)** of QM & 'system accreditation'
  - **Competitiveness enhancement**
    - Visibility enhancement of HEI (regional; national; international)
    - Guaranteeing accreditation of study programs against stakeholders
    - National competition of HEIs ('who's going to be among the first being system accredited'?)
    - Quality improvement
      - Increasing commitment of university members (with L&T and QM of L&T)
      - Advantages for faculty recruitment (e.g., introduction of systematic recruitment processes)
      - Advantages for student recruitment (e.g., international students are attracted by accredited study programmes and can apply for scholarships)
    - Leverage/ Catalyst for change
      - Trigger introduction of new processes and bodies (e.g., Q-report; Board Staff Development; WG HE didactics; WG internationalisation)
      - Trigger introduction of systematic generation processes (e.g., Board Staff Development; academic staff recruitment process)

Summary

- **Major intended desirable effects (strengths)** of 'system accreditation'
  - **Competitiveness enhancement**
    - Increased management efficiencies
      - Establishing reliable QM procedures
      - Establishing common sets of performance indicators
      - Professionalisation in internal QM
    - Program revisions
      - More transparency of study programs and their strengths and weeknesses
      - Positive consequences of internal audits (for current programs) and conception audits (for new programs which shall be introduced): identification of weaknesses and their premature eliminiation
    - New programs/ initiatives, e.g., system accreditation has positive effects for other achievement areas
      - Recognition of further education programs (e.g., HFU Academy as system accredited institution for further education)
      - Quality handbooks for specific types of teaching (e.g., 'production' in a media university)
      - Reputation gain of programs through accreditation including external assessment
      - Advantages for the university when applying for innovative programs (e.g., project funding of the ministry of science, research and education for cooperative program UAS-Uni)
      - Establishing a research database

Summary

- **Major non-intended effects** (**strengths**/**weaknesses**) of QM & 'system accreditation'
  - Generate motivation and tendencies or efforts to broaden the scope of QM (e.g., by integrating research, administration, Third Mission)
  - No (observable) effect on (explicit) strategy of the institution (e.g., no change of SDP; mission statement(s))
- **Possible** (mid- and longterm) **effects** (**strengths**/**weaknesses**) of QM which are not yet observable (and not easy to be ascribed):
  - Increase in number of students
  - Increase in internationalisation (students; staff; …)
  - Increase of retention and graduation rates
  - Improvement of employment prospects for graduates
  - Increase of research productivity
  - Increase of reputation for further/ advanced education offered by the university (e.g., HFU Academy as system accredited institution for further education)

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