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Value and Challenges of the University and Evaluation in University Governance

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- **Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University**
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Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

Seems there is an “**ongoing debate regarding the purpose and function of institutions of higher education**” (Saichaie & Morphew 2014, 499).

[particularly in the US, Australia and UK but not only there]

(also cf. Anderson 2010; Barnett 2016; Barnett 2018; Buller 2014; Escotet 2012; Etzkowitz et al. 2000; Giroux 2002; Granados 2015; Harkavy 2006; Kreimendahl et al. 2014; Leiber 2019a; Marginson 2007; Marginson 2016; Rhoades & Stensaker 2017; Scott 2006; Seeber et al. 2017; Stekeler-Weithofer 2008; Tetens 2008)

“In a **more instrumental period**, with **rapidly growing obligations of and pressures on higher education**, the **vision of the university as a critical institution needs to be renewed** – just as it has been periodically renewed throughout its history” (2016 CHER Conference, Opening Gambit, <http://cher2016.admeus.net/> [accessed: 6 August 2019])



Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

Ergo: **working definition** of the concept of the contemporary **University** as
“**multiple hybrid incomplete organisation**”

- Hybrid of: **Strategic, open Republic of Scholars & Students** (“statutory corporation” = “rechtsfähige öffentlich-rechtliche Körperschaft”) & **Societal educational institution** (“state institution”), committed to certain **values & tasks** (L&T; research; third mission; ...) & endowed with certain **rights & related responsibilities**:
- Hybrid of: **Learning and Teaching; Research; Third Mission** (e.g. education for employability & vocational training; transfer to industry/technology; transdisciplinarity; services to society; ...)

Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

Working definition of the concept of the contemporary **University** as “**multiple hybrid incomplete organisation**” [continued]

- **Value & work community**
 - Scholars strive for getting a qualification to **teach & pass scholars & students & administration on acquired wisdom**
 - Students aim to get a **broad education for life (“personality development”**: various self-competences & social competences; **“critical thinking”, judgments and decisions/creativity; pre-professional education**), which usually includes achieving an **academic qualification** (in sciences, humanities, or arts) to be **enabled to take up a qualified employment** or profession (including becoming an academic scholar)
 - Institution of higher learning & teaching engaged with **pushing out the frontiers of knowledge** (on basis of a decent range of subjects of study and research)
- **Right of academic freedom**, i.e. the institution is endowed with some guarantee for the **freedom of teaching (and learning) and research**, which again is correlated to certain **human rights**, possibly constitutional rights and societal responsibilities (Hamlyn 1996, pp. 207, 213, 214).

Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

- **Right to optimal possible organisational autonomy** ('self-government') (incl., e.g., strategies in research and L&T; curricula; staff & student recruitment; internal quality management by peer/peer assessment; ...)

At the level of the individual, autonomy directly corresponds to reflected and **content-rich self-determination (successful self-development) through goal-tracking**, which considers **intrinsic** (if not innate) **psychological needs** for competence, self-determination, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan 2000).

- **Science Communication and Management:** The aim must be to **“dynamically compare”** the right to **organisational autonomy** with the so-called **public interest**, which should be represented by some lay personel (e.g. university council; board of lay trustees) – lay and expert personel and their organisational bodies should not be intermingled but meet in continuing, open, transparent and critical discourse – but more so by **confidence-building activities through enlightened education, transparency, communication, accountability and responsibility ...**



Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

- **Right to award own degrees & set own standards of assessment**, subject to the institutional arrangements that govern the preservation of the standards community of higher education, which is embedded in a democratic society (related: responsibility for QA of assessments and degrees)

“Thus the university cannot become an arm of the state, the handmaiden of the church, or the servant of industry without threatening its autonomy, indeed its status as a university”

(Brubacher 1967, p. 239).

Such understanding, ultimately, is based on the **acceptance and active implementation** of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UNGA 1948) which defines and explicates the fundamental role of education already in the **Preamble** and mainly in **Article 26**.



Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

Summarize under three main purposes:

HEIs shall **serve the maintenance, deepening and spreading of**

- (1) freedom and democracy,**
- (2) knowledge and innovation, and**
- (3) sustainable behaviour of humankind and conservation of their environment.**

In short: › **The task of a University is the creation of the future**, so far as rational thought, and civilized modes of appreciation, can affect the issue‹
(Whitehead 1938, p. 233).

Such creativity can only be realized at a (public) institution, which cultivates and promotes **critically reflected, enlightened knowledge in all areas** (including **philosophical scepticism** required to come to grips with the unavoidable ambivalences of our contemporary world)

Therefore, HEIs can be called **core drivers and core carriers of mankind's future**, for better or for worse.



Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University



- **Institutional and organisational changes**

- To improve their mission to **educate**, **train** and carry out **research**, all under the meta goal of **sustainability**;
- To improve the **management of resources** (human, economic, etc.);
- To **activate and acquire more public funding**;
- ...

Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

- **Changes in knowledge creation and dissemination**
 - To take **interdisciplinary approaches**;
 - To take **transdisciplinary approaches** including the exploration of non-scientific forms of knowledge;
 - To explore and make use of **information and communication technologies**;
 - To **anticipate social and societal needs through research and community learning**;
 - To **effectively share research outcomes with society through appropriate knowledge transfer mechanisms**;
 - To **critically reflect research input and outcomes/impact and develop recommendations for sustainable** – dynamic comparison of social, economic and ecological aspects required – **research** in all fields (e.g. **enforce science standards in all disciplines; avoid hype and fashion; avoid “over-researching” as well as “under-researching”**; ...) – **not un-tricky at all, very risky – no God's eye point of view available**
 - ...



Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University



- **Changes in the educational model**
 - To **integrate new teaching/learning approaches including more interactivity** between **teachers and students**, **students and students** as well as **teachers and teachers** to enable the development of critical and creative thinking;
 - To foster models of **life-long learning**;
 - To **define and monitor desired competencies and learning outcomes common to all higher education graduates** (for example, knowledge and wisdom in ethical, democratic, and social values and relevant methodologies).
 - ...

Value and Challenges (and Threats) of the Contemporary University

Hard to imagine how these and further challenges could be approached (and possibly solved) without some sort of systematic, thorough **QUALITY MANAGEMENT** of L&T, research, third mission – including indispensable mechanisms of **COMMUNICATION** –, comprising various forms of **external and internal EVALUATION**.

Questions

- What role does **evaluation** (and accreditation) play in **governance** (and quality development) of HEIs?
- What is the **value of evaluation in higher education**?
- What are the **challenges of evaluation in HEIs**? Does **evaluation threaten** the role and **identity of the university**?
- Are **external** evaluations and certifications in HEIs **necessary, dispensable or harmful**, or are they all of this?



Governance and Evaluation in Multiple Hybrid Organisations

- Contemporary research
 - Adequate governance models of HEIs as ›multiple hybrid organisations‹ (e.g., Kleimann 2016) are based on variable and dynamic mixtures of the core governance functions of **institutional autonomy**, **accountability** (or **responsibility**) and **competition**
 - In public administration and particularly in the higher education sector, autonomy, accountability and competition are seen as ›**complex and chameleon-like term[s]**‹ (Mulgan 2000, p. 555), ›**cherished concept[s], sought after but elusive**‹ (Sinclair 1995, p. 219; see also Leiber 2017, pp. 31ff.)
 - Nevertheless, these **governance core functions** are characteristic for HEIs: they are **competitors** for research projects, grant funders, cooperation partners, awards, institutional prestige, students, academic staff, positions in research rankings, etc. on regional, national and global levels; HEIs are morally and legally **accountable** to their immediate customers, funders and sponsors (e.g., accountability functions such as constraining ›arbitrary power, thereby discouraging fraud and manipulation‹ (Huisman & Currie 2004, p. 531); regulating institutions' activities and sustaining or raising ›the quality of performance by forcing those involved to examine their operations critically and to subject them to critical review from outside‹ (ibid.))

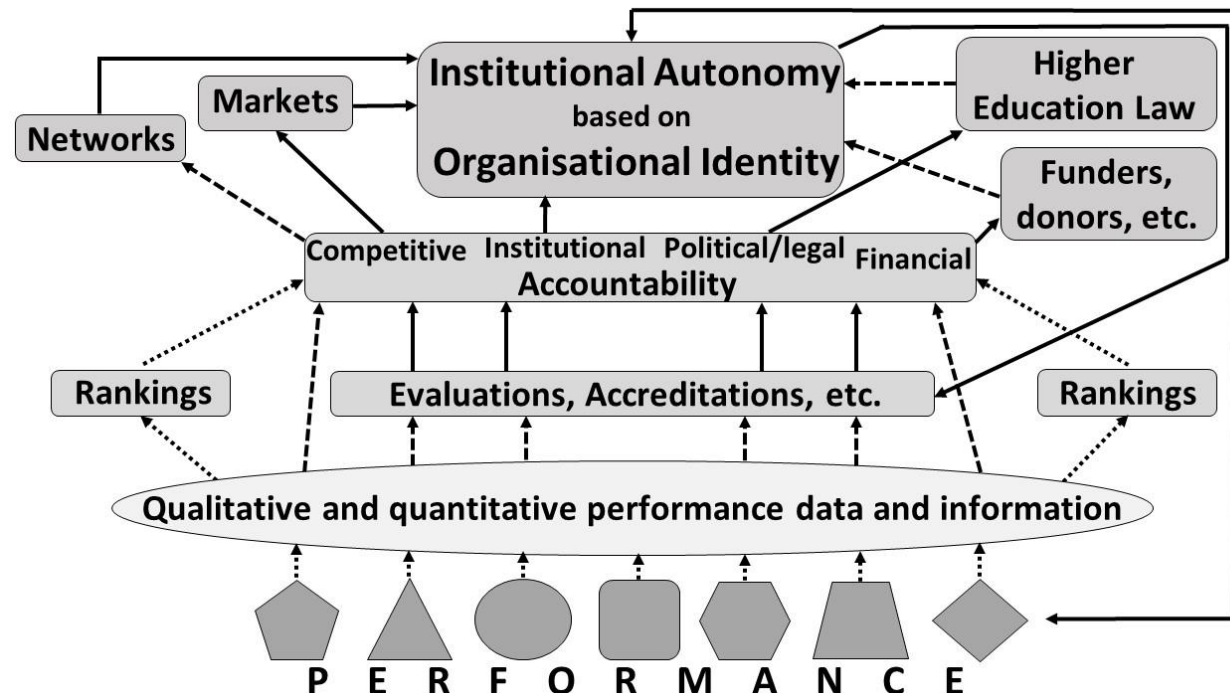
Governance and Evaluation in Multiple Hybrid Organisations

- **Institutional autonomy** or **organisational identity** refers to organisations who **give themselves objective organisational rules that they obey**, as far as they can determine **why and what** for the institution exists ('mission'), how they strive for their goals ('mission') on the basis of which **values of decision-making** ('values'), and what the institutions **want to become in the future** ('vision') (Leiber 2016a, p. 102).

In other words: **Institutional autonomy can be implemented by integrated performance governance** which is based on a **strategy**, including mission, vision and values, and **comprehensive performance assessment** in the context of some **systemic quality management**.

Governance and Evaluation in Multiple Hybrid Organisations

Thus, institutional autonomy means to self-organise and keep in balance ‘the dynamic interplay of functions, needs and requirements from inside and outside of the modern university: higher education law; funders and donors; markets and networks [...]; etc. Usually, funders, recipients of performance (surveys), **evaluations**, accreditations, benchmarking, ratings, rankings etc. **assess certain types and areas of university performance at very different levels and to a very wide range of empirical reliability**’ (Leiber 2017, p. 33)



The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Concept and Intended Functions of Evaluation

- Evaluation is a type of **applied social research** which is designed to provide a systematic **basis for decision-making processes**, including non-scientific ones, which contribute to **solving practical, societal and political problems** (Clemens 2000, p. 215). Also in contrast to basic/foundational research, evaluation is **usually commissioned** work, i.e. the customers define the object and goals of investigation, invite tenders for evaluation projects and award contracts using certain, not always first and foremost scientific, criteria [**concept of science!; science communication!**].

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Concept and Intended Functions of Evaluation

- Science-based evaluations – know exactly what, for what, by what criteria, by whom and how – follow criteria (cf. Stockmann 2016, p. 36):
 - Refer to **clearly defined evaluation objects**.
 - Use **empirical** (social science) **research methods** for information gain.
 - Assessment is carried out according to explicitly determined, **intersubjectively provable criteria**.
 - For the **assessment** of information, **systematic** (comparative) **procedures** are used.
 - Implementation is carried out by **specifically competent and trained persons** (evaluators).
 - Evaluations have the goal to **determine the usefulness (value) of an evaluation object to enable or facilitate decision-making** (>follow-up<).

Evaluations following this scheme can be modelled by Deming (plan-do-check-act) cycles (Moen & Norman 2011); ‘action research’.

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Concept and Intended Functions of Evaluation

- Evaluations designed according to these criteria: **four** analytically, though often not pragmatically, **distinctive functions** (ibid., pp. 38ff.) including operations of critical Enlightenment:
 - **Gaining knowledge;**
 - **Exercise of control;**
 - **Triggering quality development and learning processes** (e.g. formative evaluation; ›quality as sense-making‹: Marshall 2016);
 - **Legitimation of the evaluated objects** (e.g. activation of responsibility/accountability for evaluated object; generation of confidence and trust).

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Concept and Intended Functions of Evaluation

- Evaluations can be carried out under various perspectives of analysis and knowledge gain, because they can be used
 - To improve the **strategy** of a programme or a measure (**ex-ante evaluation**);
 - To observe the **implementation** processes (**on-going evaluation**);
 - To determine in retrospect **efficacy and sustainability of interventions** (**ex-post evaluation**) (ibid., p. 40).
- Finally, depending on the purpose of use and the related knowledge interest, evaluations can
 - Be more **formative**, i.e. actively shaping, process-oriented, constructive, and promotive to communication,
 - Or more **summative**, i.e. summarizing, accounting and results-oriented.

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Concept and Intended Functions of Evaluation

- Sophisticated model → Often, rather **exalted demands** are placed on evaluations because,
 - Ideally, they should provide a ›comprehensive information base‹ about the quality of the evaluated objects,
 - Which must be generated with reasonable financial and timely expenditure;
 - Meets the interests of the various stakeholders;
 - Facilitates reliable (evidence-based) assessments of the evaluated objects;
 - ›Can serve as a basis for decision-making‹;
 - ›Provides a justification for decision-making‹;
 - Leads to improvements of the evaluated object's quality (Großmann & Wolbring 2016, pp. 8-9).

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Pivotal Roles and Goals of Evaluation in Higher Education

- Specify above-listed four distinctive functions of evaluation for the context of HEIs → **four pivotal roles of evaluation in higher education** (cf. Eaton 2003):
 - Sustaining and enhancing the quality of higher education;
 - Maintaining the academic values of higher education;
 - Buffering against the politicizing of higher education;
 - Serving (further) public interest and need.

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Pivotal Roles and Goals of Evaluation in Higher Education

- Sustaining and enhancing the quality of higher education

Four sub-functions (CHEA 2010; Eaton 2003),

- **Verification** that an institution, programme or qualification meets established (minimum) standards (functions of quality assurance and competitive and institutional accountability);
- **Gatekeeping for a threshold level of quality** through screening functions of eligibility, candidacy for initial accreditation, and the grant of initial accreditation (e.g., academic and fiscal practices) (functions of quality assurance and competitive and institutional accountability);
- Fulfilling the requirement of **engagement routines and faculty and staff involvement** in quality improvement (institutions and programmes) (e.g. creating goals for self-improvement; stimulating a general raising of standards among HEIs) (functions of competitive accountability and institutional autonomy);
- Continuing **professionalisation of quality assurance** (e.g. cooperation of quality assurance agencies and HEIs; counseling by quality assurance professionals) and realisation of scrutiny and constructive self-criticism of higher education (functions of competitive accountability and institutional autonomy).

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Pivotal Roles and Goals of Evaluation in Higher Education

- Maintaining the academic values of higher education

Most controversial of the four pivotal roles – Does evaluation help to safeguard the fundamental values of universities: institutional autonomy; academic freedom; commitment to degree education and general education; collegial self-governance –

Based in this contribution: **Yes!**

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Pivotal Roles and Goals of Evaluation in Higher Education

- Buffering against the politicizing of higher education

Since governments rely on evaluation to assure academic quality, evaluation serves as a measure of protection for institutions and programmes against undue political influence (e.g. in human resource policy and management; financial policy; institutional strategy) and (other) harmful external and internal pressure (function of [institutional autonomy](#)).

The Value of Evaluation in Higher Education

Pivotal Roles and Goals of Evaluation in Higher Education

- Serving (further) public interest and need
 - Assisting various public stakeholders when making key financial, personal, and career decisions (e.g. accredited status of institution/programme significant when selecting for study; required by government for providing taxpayer support for grants; required by employers as a condition of hire) (functions of **competitive accountability** and **institutional autonomy**);
 - Assisting institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits (function of **competitive accountability**).

Challenges of Evaluation in University Governance

- **Evaluation in higher education** faces a **variety of challenges**, among them the relationship between evaluation and incentives, requirements for professionalization, and methodological pitfalls and shortcomings in measuring performance quality (e.g. problems of survey design, operationalisation, sampling, ensuring response rates of surveys, adequate interpretation of data etc.)
- Additional **methodological, operational and epistemological weaknesses and challenges of evaluation and accreditation** – based on national and international experience of a German quality assurance agency (evalag 2017) in evaluation and accreditation, and several contemporary European efficacy studies of quality management in HEIs in the area of **learning and teaching** (Ditzel 2017; IMPALA 2016; Lueg 2014; Pietzonka 2015; Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, & Westerheijden 2011; Suchanek, Pietzonka, Künzel, & Fütterer 2012)

Challenges of Evaluation in University Governance

- In general, **evaluations** and accreditations **in higher education** are **science-oriented** (i.e. fulfil above-listed quality criteria of science-based evaluations)
- However, types of challenges for and weaknesses of evaluation in higher education can be identified (also cf. Suchanek et al. 2012)
 - **Complexity of quality processes**
 - **Poor procedural elements**
 - **Poor implementation**
 - **Difficulty to engage academics**
 - **Poor understanding and non-empirical objections**

All these issues revolve around and approach the core problem, **how to systematically integrate evaluation into academic and administration processes**

- It is a truism, that it is not at all easy to look deeply into HEI quality processes, particularly in teaching and learning (e.g. processes are complicated, opaque, foreclosed by academic freedom; analysis is expensive, in time, money and know-how). This makes it **difficult, if not impossible, to design comprehensive evaluations which can satisfy sufficiently many stakeholder expectations at one time.**
[not generally curable]

- Complicatedness of **procedural** specifications

Evaluation criteria refer to further specification papers which refer to further documents etc., often written by different stakeholders from faculty, institutional, policy or external public level. Such cross-referencing may cause semantic difficulties (e.g. contradictions; incoherence; redundancies), that are sometimes recoverable, and sometimes not. [partially curable]

- Deficient **communication**

HEIs sometimes criticize deficient communication by external evaluation providers. This may be due to a poor understanding of participation [curable] or prohibition to counsel (e.g. in the case of accreditation). [not curable]

Poor Procedural Elements

- **Poor follow-up**

Missing or rudimentary follow-up is a classic in evaluation: **very often**, the **implementation of evaluation recommendations is not carried out**, or not to a satisfying extent, and it is not always sufficiently checked. [curable]

- **Lack of development-orientation**

By purpose and definition, programme accreditation is unavoidably rather (experienced as) a permission procedure than a procedure of quality development. This criticism can only be countered by avoiding programme accreditation in the sense of a formal approval process including a legally binding decision. [not curable]

Poor Implementation

- **It may be difficult to interpret evaluation reports because of imprecise differentiation of facts, assessments and recommendations for change.** [curable]
- **Evaluators can be ineffective/inefficient** (e.g. misinterpretation of evaluation criteria; deficient question guide for evaluation; poor organisation of evaluation procedure; formal and linguistic deficiencies). [curable]
- **Peers can be ineffective/inefficient** (e.g. competence and expertise differences between peers with respect to knowledge and know-how of procedure and criteria; ideological attitudes towards evaluation; deviant role understandings; etc.). [partially curable]

Poor Implementation

- Accreditation **decisions can be inconsistent due to varying interpretations of accreditation specifications** as consequence of deficient or inhomogeneous standardisation of accreditation procedure (e.g. distribution of ECTS credits among semesters; fixing of examination formats; upper limits for credits of a module; introduction of illegitimate specifications). [curable]
- **Bureaucratic and formalized conditions** may be imposed, which are irrelevant to quality. [curable]
- In competition for customers, particularly for formal approval processes including a legally binding decision a **tendency may occur to lower quality requirements** in favour of a higher number of passed accreditations. [curable]

Two main reasons why evaluation often has a hard time in HEIs can be subsumed under the difficulty to reach and motivate academics on evaluation issues:

- **The right to self-government and the right of academic freedom**

Behind this complex issue slumber, more or less wide-spread, **misunderstandings**, since, in reality, **universities' self-governance** is (and always has been) **unavoidably dependent** on various framework conditions (such as legitimate claims of budget funders; respecting the protective right of any stakeholder and the right to exert influence). In addition, the extent to which (not the fact that) **academic freedom** is compatible with **institutional autonomy** and **shared governance** on the one hand and with **evaluation** on the other hand **must be negotiated** transparently in the political and the academic system. [curable]

Challenges of Evaluation in University Governance

Lack of Influence on Academics

- The type of employment

In many countries, academic researchers and teachers in higher education are civil servants, who enjoy special protection rights that make it difficult or even impossible to enforce (evidence-based) sanctions including those which are based on evaluations. [curable]

Challenges of Evaluation in University Governance

Poor Understanding and Non-Empirical Objections

- Some stakeholders claim that, at least accreditation, is characterized by high costs and poor effort/benefit ratio. However, in Germany direct accreditation expenses (10 Million €) were 0.02% of total HEI expenses (46 Billion €) in 2013 (AR 2016). [curable]
- A minority of stakeholders still cultivate the attitude that any form of systematic quality management of HEIs, particularly its external components, should be abolished altogether. These stakeholders insinuate an overwhelming bureaucratization and quality assurance being an illegitimate interference from a central management which holds too much managerial power in its hands to control, steer and discipline academics. [partially curable]

Challenges of Evaluation in University Governance

Poor Understanding and Non-Empirical Objections

- An example from the German context is an Open Letter of German university professors (OLHP 2016), which is largely, if not completely, free of inter-subjectively justifiable argument, however full of unjustifiable invectives and plainly wrong statements. It is noteworthy that this open letter call received 2,511 supporters on change.org which corresponds to 0.075% of 3,331,039 Germany HEI members (including 45,631 teachers, 530,000 further employees and 2,755,408 students in 2015/16; sources: *Freie Presse*, 28 August 2015, *statista*, 30 June 2016).

- Summing up: evaluation, particularly accreditation, has its weaknesses and challenges, among them those listed above. Most of them are curable and solvable, at least partially, by according methodological and operational measures and rigorousness. Weaknesses which can only partially be cured are usually those which originate from **lack of methodological knowledge** and **rationality deficits of argument**. While non-curable weaknesses of evaluations are those which are **›system immanent‹** (e.g. complexity of quality processes; legally binding nature of accreditation decisions).

Conclusions

- **Evaluations**, if well-designed and well-executed, can **serve the core accountability functions**
 - Of contributing to constraining arbitrary power originating from academic, administrative and political hierarchies;
 - Of contributing to sustaining quality of performance;
 - Of contributing to regulating institutions' activities.
- Comprehensive **evaluations** usually **fulfil certain quality criteria of accountability**, since they
 - Contribute to giving a consistently fair assessment of performance;
 - Are open for feedback and dialogue;
 - Can have a trust-building effect (cf. Stensaker & Harvey 2011, p. 15).
- **Evaluations** and accreditations can **contribute to competitiveness enhancement**.

Conclusions

- (Development-oriented, formative) **evaluations are fundamental building blocks of safeguarding the value of the university and approaching its contemporary challenges**
 - Because they are main **ingredients** to **quality assurance** and **quality enhancement** (in all performance areas);
 - Because they are required ingredients of **systematic enhancement of institutional autonomy** and **successful organisational self-governance** of universities in view of their complexity, growth, globalisation, variety of performance areas, and their importance for a sustainable future of knowledge societies and mankind (including extra-human nature) as evaluations can be **integrated in strategy and evidence-informed decision-making**.

Conclusions

- Although most of the weaknesses and challenges of evaluation are curable, it should not be forgotten that there exists one **intrinsic meta-vulnerability of quality assurance and evaluation**: This is the not unfrequent phenomenon of **›goal displacement‹ in organisations** (a term coined by famous sociologist Robert K. Merton), which emerges **when means and tools in organisations, that should serve certain goals, are changed into goals and self-purposes in their own right.**

Evaluation, general		
Accreditation (formal approval process including legally binding decision)	Certification (formal approval process & option of recognition at regional council)	Evaluation Audit Organisational development (voluntary assessment & development processes)
Programme accreditation Institutional accreditation	Certification of (further) education institutions and (further) education programmes	Evaluation of subjects, programmes, projects, institutions, strategies Audit of quality management Organisation development in various performance areas and service units; strategy building; human resource management; etc.

Table: Methodological varieties of evaluation in higher education (choice)

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