

Governance of the Entrepreneurial University

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Abstract

Traditional governance structures in large research institutions have remained relatively unchanged in the last 40 years. This relative stability stands in contrast to prolific changes that have occurred in the make up of those carrying out the work and the goals that these people pursue. Expansion of entrepreneurial activities such as distance education programs, corporate partnerships, development of patented intellectual property, and establishment of new research centers represent common trends among institutions in the Research I sector. There is concern that the traditional governance structures might not handle the scope of this change or respond to the needs of the contemporary university in a timely fashion.

To establish a framework of understanding for effective governance of entrepreneurial activities we will begin with a review of literature. We will explore the traditional structures of governance and the pressures exerted on these structures by recent trends. We will identify characteristics and trends of entrepreneurial activity at the academe and the resultant effects on decision-making. The organizational coupling of entrepreneurial units, the organizational culture found in units, and their relationship to other components of the university will be examined. Finally we will attempt to view these challenges to governance through theories about university structure, culture, and relations. While we contend that reformers are unlikely to yield more effective entrepreneurial activities by focusing on the structure of decision-making, we look instead to cultural aspects of the organization. We conclude that effective entrepreneurial activities derive predominantly from cultural dynamics and relationships between stakeholders bonded in trust.

Governance Challenged by Entrepreneurialism

Governance is the term we use to describe the structures we define and utilize for decision-making, influence, and control of higher education institutions. In American institutions of higher learning the governance structures result in some balance between the legal authority of the administration and the professional authority of the faculty. Many Research I institutions are steeped in tradition and utilize governance structures that have changed little in the recent past. In the last 40 years these same institutions have been increasingly forced to react to environmental changes and market pressures. Expansion of entrepreneurial activities such as distance education programs, corporate partnerships, development of patented intellectual property, and establishment of new research centers represent common trends among institutions in the Research I sector. There is a perception among some scholars that traditional governance presents a barrier to effective response to the changes facing the modern entrepreneurial university (Kezar, 2004; Mallon, 2004). Other scholars warn that continued expansion of the university's purposes and goals would extend the periphery beyond the reach of the current governance structures with the consequence of unguided and unintended institutional transformation (Birnbaum, 2004; Mallon, 2004).

To establish a framework of understanding for effective governance of entrepreneurial activities we will begin with a review of literature. We will explore the traditional structures of governance and the pressures exerted on these structures by recent trends. We will identify characteristics and trends of entrepreneurial activity at the academe and the resultant effects. The organizational coupling of entrepreneurial units, the organizational culture found in units, and their relationship to other components of the university will be examined. Finally we will attempt to view these challenges to governance through theories about university structure,

culture, and relations. Having examined this body of research, we will attempt to establish our conclusions by relating existing research on governance to the specific challenges presented by the entrepreneurial activities of the contemporary research university.

Those seeking to govern the entrepreneurial university must set the stage for effective decision-making that allows the growth of entrepreneurial activity that flows from and strengthens an institution's core values. The contemporary research institution is composed of a growing cast of specialists that approach higher education from different perspectives and have been called to the academe to serve different purposes and achieve different outcomes. In the coming years administrators must be equipped to establish relationships that transcend the layers between the peripheral activities and the core of the university. While we contend that reformers are unlikely to yield more effective entrepreneurial activities by focusing on the structure of decision-making, we look instead to cultural aspects of the organization. We conclude that effective entrepreneurial activities derive predominantly from cultural dynamics and relationships between stakeholders bonded in trust.

Traditional Governance

Governance of universities is often seen from two different perspectives. The first viewpoint describes the two channels of authority found in a university organization (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). One channel represents the legal authority of the governing board extending downward through the organization through the president and the administrators of the university. The other channel represents the professional authority of the faculty, which asserts itself up through the organization through committees and faculty senates. Another perspective presents governance as a concession of authority primarily to one constituency over the others in regards to a specific domain (AAUP, 1990). For instance, Faculty retain primary authority over

curriculum meanwhile the other parties defer authority over financial matters to the administration. At the university level faculty have traditionally had a defined role in governance through their formation of a faculty senate and other committee structures as representative decision-making bodies (Kezar, 2004).

Since we are focusing on the actions of specific subunits of a large university organization, we will examine at a deeper level the traditional workings of an academic department. At the unit level, governance of an academic department has traditionally relied heavily on the faculty. Departments are a necessity at a large research university where the demands on upper level administration requires a bureaucratic structure with lower administrators. Departments generally have primary responsibility for faculty appointments, curriculum, and teaching assignments. With the rise of professionalism in the faculty ranks departmental decision-making has grown to rely on collegial decision-making (Mallon, 2004). Chairpersons are often elected by the faculty in the department or appointed with the input of the faculty. The chairperson traditionally has limited positional authority and may not act effectively without the support of their faculty (Hecht, 1999). Shared governance at the departmental level can be described as decision making largely made by faculty committees prescribing formal actions on the part of the chair. The changing nature of the university creates pressure on several fronts for this traditional form of shared governance of the unit.

Diversification of Faculty

The fundamental makeup of the faculty body has significantly changed in the last 50 years. At a large research institution there are now several distinct classifications of faculty. Close to half of all faculty are part-time academic staff with little or no job security (Altbach, 2005). Tenure-track faculty members at many research one institutions are increasingly

pressured to specialize in the pursuit of research, publication, or patent. There are also growing numbers of non-tenure-track full time faculty that while expected to fill a larger governance role, ought not to be expected to have the same voice in governance typical of those with greater security. With the increased diversity found among the faculty body, universities have found ways to incorporate these growing populations into governance structures, abandoning the tenure based oligarchy of the past (Mallon, 2004). There has also been a growth of faculty like groups such as post-doctoral appointees, non-faculty researchers, and graduate and research assistants (Mallon, 2004). Many of the members of these growing segments are highly specialized and hold a self-perception of themselves as employees rather than pupils, apprentices, or students (Gumport, 2005). This burgeoning specialization of duties and diversification of the ranks muddles the clarity of departmental decision-making and introduces several additional viewpoints and value systems into the governance of each academic unit and the university as a whole.

Escalation of Support Staff and Administrators

In the same period that the faculty body has been undergoing a process of diversification, universities have also experienced a growth in importance of non-faculty employees. Observers have noted the danger of assuming all non-faculty personnel are administrators. “Such personnel do not fit neatly into the dichotomous and adversarial schemata of faculty versus management. They violate the schemata in a fundamental way. They are not faculty. But neither are they management.” (Rhoades, 1998) Clearly non-faculty employees of administrative or managerial function and those that are production oriented employees represent growing proportions when compared to the faculty population.

Administrators and support staff have accounted for most of the growth in the academe at the professional level. From 1975 to 1985, administrative/managerial/executive professional experienced 18 percent growth, while other professionals experienced 61 percent growth (Rhoades, 1998). By contrast, over the same period, faculty experienced only 6 percent growth. From 1985 to 1990, increases for the three categories of executive, support professional, and faculty were 14, 28, and 9 percent respectively (Rhoades, 1998). By 1997, faculty at 4-year institutions represented only 47% of the professional workforce, and less than one-third (31 percent) of the total workforce for that sector (Barbett & Fernandez, 2000). This continuing alteration in the balance on campus establishes a fundamental shift in the expectations of decision-making processes and perceptions of effectiveness.

Non-academic support staff members increasingly carry out the production of research and students previously seen as the exclusive domain of the faculty (Rhoades, 1998). Support staff members envision themselves as employees and expect direction from management. As a result, support staff employees tend to relate well to the hierarchical view of the entrepreneurial unit because of the clarity of direction provided. Administrators and governing boards are more likely than faculty to appreciate the external pressures on the university and assert that a quicker decision making response is necessary (Miller, 1999). Support staff employees, because of their affinity to the direction of administrators, are also more likely to recognize the need for rapid decision-making and change than faculty (Mallon, 2004). The increased numbers of administrators and staff that work for them have been referred to as a “blight” on the campus by some observers who expect a more faculty-centric production process and see the administration as “bloated” (Andersen, 1991; Bergmann, 1991). As new purposes for the university have been placed under the umbrella of the mission, administrators have been hired to watch over these

purposes and staff hired to achieve these new aims. These growing elements frequently choose to interpret a different reality for the institution than that selected by the faculty.

Entrepreneurial Pressures and Trends Force Growth

The reasons behind the growth in non-academic staff and administration can be traced in part to the addition of numerous new activities to the realization of the mission of a research university. Athletics has long been identified as a controversial extension of the University, a challenge to shared governance, and a revenue source (Stern, 2003; Mallon, 2004). As with other areas there has been considerable high profile growth on the periphery of the university to accommodate and facilitate the undertaking of intercollegiate athletics. There has been similar peripheral growth in other areas.

Continuing education has also been an effort by universities to fulfill the outreach component of their missions while capitalizing on the needs of certain audiences for lifelong education. The evolution of telecommunications technology has facilitated a trend in continuing education and distance education that has triggered the growth of staff and organizational structures to support the “Virtual Campus” (Van Dusen, 2003). In some cases for-profit divisions or spin-offs have been created around the technology sector in an effort to capitalize on the market’s interest in technology and the competitive nature of offering “commodity” education beyond the traditional physical bounds of campus (Robins & Webster, 2002).

Obtaining sponsorship for research activities is critical to a large research university. Over time there has been shifting societal expectations, priorities, and economic conditions found in the environment surrounding research institutions (Gumport, 2005). Universities learned that they could not depend on governmental sponsorship for research, and this realization has led to a diversified pursuit of capital to sponsor research. The increase in societal

expectation that the university is a direct source of economic development has led to an increase in industry engagement activities at the university.

In response to these external pressures, there many new alliances being formed outside the university with both private research institutions and corporations. Mallon (2004) notes that “these partnerships meld two cultures – corporate and academic – that introduce new decision-making structures into the university” altering the role of traditional governance structures. In addition there is a marked increase in the technology transfer activities on campus. “Often, faculty members are deeply involved with creating profitable products and markets with their research discoveries. But technology transfer processes also represent an added layer of decision making on traditional governance” (Mallon, 2004). “Academic entrepreneurs clearly spend more time than ever before applying for external funding and seeking to develop patented products while institutions commit unprecedented levels of resources and support personnel to manage grants, contracts, technology transfer arrangements, and other related activities.”(Gayle, 2003).

Regardless of the reason for pursuing an entrepreneurial purpose, observers have found that entrepreneurial extensions of universities tend to be managed much like businesses and not with the culture of shared governance associated with traditional academic decision-making (Bleak, 2003 & Mallon, 2004). Each of these new activities requires an increase of staff and an organization of these staff into sub-units that are to carry out these entrepreneurial goals under a specific unit mission. This shift in the makeup and culture of the units forces universities to confront cultural differences and rely more heavily on deference of authority to others to sustain growth.

Proliferation of Research Centers

As an illustration of the organizational changes brought about by environmental pressures and entrepreneurial aims we will examine further the specific case of research centers. Research activities were at one time solely organized within the academic department. Now there grows a sprawling organizational fringe to most large research universities containing research centers, institutes, and corporate research joint ventures. These entities are frequently conceived as silos distinctly separate from the academic departments that house the related discipline (Mallon, 2004). At best there is a core of tenure-track faculty that are jointly appointed to an academic department, but much of the workload of these research centers is done by non-tenure-track, part-time, or postdoctoral appointees (Mallon, 2004). The creation of centers is primarily driven by entrepreneurial motivations in an effort to find sponsorship for research activities. “In an effort to broaden their funding base, universities have elaborated their organizational structures in the form of extra-departmental research units that reflect increasingly specialized areas of interdisciplinary and applied research” (Gumpert, 2005). There are several characteristics typical of these centers that set them apart from the traditional academic department.

Each center tends to be administered by a Director, appointed for an indefinite term, who wields authoritative powers over budgeting, hiring, and direction of effort (Mallon, 2004). The collegial decision making culture found among the committees of the academic departments are replaced by a hierarchical structure with a business-minded entrepreneurial orientation (Mallon, 2004). The dual system of authority discussed earlier is “confused and distorted” when research centers and institutes become the focus point of certain decision-making processes for the institution (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). Faculty influence will devolve from group influence towards the influence of a few powerful individuals capable of bringing in large amounts of

revenue (Mallon, 2004). The evolution of external research sponsorship has resulted in an organizational change response that transforms the research universities from institutions in pursuit of knowledge, to institutions in pursuit of capital. The characteristics of centers and institutes lead to similarities with a corporate management culture that left unchecked produce an aberrant process of unit level and institution level governance. The administration and faculty must reach out to entrepreneurial directors to establish shared context, shared understanding, and shared goals to overcome the tendency for decisions to be made in isolation.

Core & Periphery

The ability for a large organization of an academic nature to practically undertake many varied purposes while sustaining units of distinctly different composition has been attributed to the “loose coupling” of centers and institutes to the university (Birnbaum, 1998; Mallon, 2004). Traditional scholarship on the subject of centers and institutes being a non-factor to institutional decision-making is coming into question (Mallon, 2004). Entrepreneurial units play a role in institutional governance: they create new positions; play a strong role in hiring; employ a heavy percentage of staff; while providing revenue back to the university (Mallon, 2004). Despite their loose affiliation with the core of the institution, external forces and entrepreneurial trends within the large research institutions have increased the influence of these entrepreneurial fringes of the university.

Because of the authoritarian nature of the directorship and the influence of incoming capital, decision making at the unit level becomes weighted more heavily towards the entrepreneurial needs of the unit and less towards the needs and traditions of the center. As interpretation of institutional mission becomes influenced by entrepreneurialism and constituents act in concert to their local unit’s specific purpose to the mission, there may be breakdowns in

the traditional core values of an institution. For instance, the research-training component of graduate education may lose emphasis at an institution as faculty loyalties and budgets become organizationally divided (Gumport, 2005). Graduate employee unionization has already been seen “as a symbol of and challenge to the corporatization”, brought about by the entrepreneurial trends found at contemporary research universities (Rhoads & Rhoades, 2005). These are examples of the angst and protest that different constituents that value the core ideals of the university will bring forth when the fringe begins to overwhelm the core. The research universities face a balancing act. On one arm there are the core ideals and traditional purposes, on the other the responsiveness to their environment afforded by the creation of centers at the periphery. This balancing act is under increasing tension as the numbers of support staff, administrators, and peripheral centers increase while the shared governance models of the past continue to break down as faculty diversify and entrepreneurial stakeholders assert increasing influence and initiative.

Legacy Governance & Entrepreneurial Activities

Legacy governance structures such as faculty senates are ineffectual in governance of entrepreneurial activities and the organizational periphery. The ability to respond to changes in the market in time to be effective has been questioned. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges released a statement on governance asserting among other things that “internal governance arrangements have become so cumbersome that timely decisions are difficult to make, and small factions often are able to impede the decision-making process” (Association of Governing Boards and Universities, 2001). Most legacy governance structures provide input to the administration and the tenure-track faculty. In light of our earlier examination of the changes in the population undertaking production work within the academe, it

is now clear that the legacy governance structures no longer represent the whole institution. However, many of those structures are still valuable for issues for which those parties represented are seen by others as primary owners. Attempting to fit entrepreneurialism into legacy governance structures, however, is unlikely to be seen as effective. As a result those undertaking these endeavors must find other ways to satisfy their need for coordination, resources, and decision-making.

Mallon (2004) asserts that entrepreneurial centers and institutes represent a “disjointed” form of shared governance because of the fragmented nature of institutional processes and decision-making. It is “disjointed” because it represents a decision-making process “in which there is no articulation of the various parts or the whole, no consideration of the interaction among parts, and a lack of comprehensive strategy to meet a set of goals” (Mallon, 2004). Mallon (2004) goes on to illustrate the manner in which research centers and institutes tend to interact with the central university:

In the domains of unit-level and institution-level decision-making, centers and institutes can introduce change in the university without having to confront traditional governance or engage in normal decision-making procedures (Hays, 1991). Centers and institutes are examples of academic governance that occurs in an invisible, parallel, and disjointed universe. The role of centers in academic governance is often invisible because they operate under the radar of the vast majority of faculty members and administrators. Because they are not incorporated within normative governance processes, centers and institutes influence decision making informally, through one-on-one negotiation, and outside traditional processes. For example, an entrepreneurial center director who successfully negotiates more space or better facilities because of large research funding

may be able to circumvent the typical bureaucratic governance process for such decisions. (Mallon, 2004)

This description of decision-making and use of influence underscores the importance of the informal connections of units to the central university and the dangers of localized thinking. The context in which center and unit directors perceive they operate in, their interpretation of mission, and relationships to those outside their unit take on a greater importance than the formal chain of command.

Frames of Reference for Entrepreneurial Governance

Theorists ordinarily describe governance of university activities through use of specific frames that adapt organizational theory to the workings of the university. This approach is useful because universities are identified as being particularly difficult to comprehend. In comparison to most organizations, universities have numerous ambiguous and conflicting goals, utilize technologies and techniques that are difficult to classify, and depend heavily on the professional autonomy of their workforce. Because this paper focuses on the relationship of specific fringe activities to the central mission of a large institution we have selected the following frames that have been established by scholars to theorize about university governance.

Birnbaum set out four theoretical frames (bureaucratic, collegial, political, and anarchical) for describing the activity of governing the university (Birnbaum, 1998). The Bureaucratic frame explains the university as a hierarchy of clearly defined roles and is most useful in understanding the business like structure of a standalone entrepreneurial unit under the control of a director (Birnbaum, 1998). The hierarchical view of the bureaucratic frame also illustrates the proliferation of mid-level administrators that report to a specific superior, in the form of the sub-unit directorship. This framework obviously has limitations since faculty don't

see themselves as employees who report to a chain-of-command (Rhoades, 1998). Meanwhile, the collegial frame describes the process of governance by consensus among a group that collectively sets a direction and sustains a set of values (Birnbaum, 1998). The collegial frame best describes the utopian governance of an academic department. In light of the diversification of academic and non-academic professionals and the sheer variety of organizational units on campus, it is not difficult to see the limitations of this framework to the current situation of the research university. While directors and employees of entrepreneurial units probably associate more closely with the “bureaucratic” frame and perceive the world along those lines, chairpersons and faculty likely associate more closely with the “collegial” framework.

Birnbaum’s “Political” frame describes decision making in terms of self-interest and power (Birnbaum, 1998). The political viewpoint is most useful when comparing the interactions of autonomous directors on the fringe and their influence on institution wide decision-making and central administrators. The Anarchical frame explains the university as an organized anarchy of individual actors. Organized anarchy provides a set of concepts useful in comparing the actions of autonomous parties that have varied and possibly divergent goals and values. The anarchical frame helps to explain why it is so difficult to get the institution focused on any common purpose and establishes the importance of establishing sub-units to focus on specific goals. By combining these frameworks, future research may better model the behavior of individual actors on the entrepreneurial stage. The political frame illustrates the motivation of individuals while the anarchical frame provides a model for the interaction and intersection of their interests.

Entrepreneurial activities and organizations on campus derive from a complex set of actors interacting with both traditional purposes of the academe and emergent pressures and

changes in the environment. The frames describing governance that we've just examined help us to understand the current of activities and the different structural viewpoints. Scholars have established that the "bounds of rational thought" prevent individuals, including unit-level administrators, from rationally comprehending the university in breadth or depth of complexity (Birnbaum, 1998; Mallon, 2004; Minor & Tierney, 2005). Perhaps if participants were well versed in the theories of "how colleges work" they would make better use of their governance structures. Such rational capabilities remain unlikely to be realized since the different modes of administration found in an academic unit versus an entrepreneurial unit yield individuals that approach the theoretical frames with different perceptions and would likely choose different frames as the dominant perspective (Birnbaum, 1998). The theoretical frames established by Birnbaum provide little insight as to how individuals relying on different frames of understanding can act effectively together and overcome the disjointed nature of governing entrepreneurialism. How faculty and administrators establish relationships that yield effective decision-making gains importance in light of an understanding that no two individuals are likely to share a common perception.

Moving Beyond the Structure of Governance

Many reformers will identify strategies to reorganize the formal binding of units or restructure governance processes. The structure of entrepreneurialism, many sub-units led by directors, is important to allow diverse goals to be pursued and to maintain organizational flexibility (Gayle, 2003; Mallon, 2004). Minor establishes two theoretical frames, rational and cultural, with which to view governance. The rational frame describes governance as a definable entity that can be comprehended by all participants, generalized by rules, and therefore become predictable (Minor & Tierney, 2005; Tierney, 1987). The rational frame describes a situation that

is nearly the polar opposite of the situation presented by the disjointed governance of entrepreneurial centers that act without understanding the whole university, other units, or the overall goals of the university (Mallon, 2004). Birnbaum (2004) suggests that reforms to structure, regulations, and rules governing the rational frame have largely had no effect or bad effects when they conflict with the socialization and expectation of participants. Scholars have indicated that shared governance can be saved not by attempting rational decision making and focusing on rearranging the structure of decision making, but instead by focusing on cultural aspects (Birnbaum, 2005; Del Favero, 2003; Minor & Tierney, 2005).

Minor and Tierney's (2005) other framework for viewing shared governance describes a "cultural perspective". The cultural frame emphasizes the organization as a "social construct that undergoes transformations and reinterpretations based on dynamic contexts and the constant entry and exit of individuals" (Minor & Tierney, 2005). This viewpoint emphasizes the importance of context, and the evolution of that context and individual interpretations over time. Birnbaum (2004) presents a similar framework in describing "Soft" governance based on the social interactions and connections that establish social norms over time. The broad scope and variety of the university may stress our existing structures. However fundamentally changing those structures is futile given the limits described by the rational frame, and the limits of comprehension for each individual. The cultural frame provides a basis for viewing the predominance of cultural dynamics and relationships as fundamental to effective decision-making. What becomes most important is the continued evolution of relationships, partnerships, discussions, and networks that lead to the most effective decisions. "The collegial model of consensus is dropped in favor of a cultural model of creative conflict" (Minor & Tierney, 2005).

Del Favero (2003) provides a model based on theories of social capital, social exchange, and social networks that explain the importance of relationships to effective governance. Del Favero (2003) proposed theories for traditional shared governance tension that apply equally well to the tensions of entrepreneurialism and disjointed governance described by Mallon (2004). Rewarding change experienced by the center director and the academic unit chairperson, encourages them to participate in future interactions with each other. Eventually these relationships will begin to form a social network that leads to more effective decisions because of shared trust. Because of the effects of trust on social systems, some scholars believe that effective governance can occur only when each participant internalizes trust in to their belief system (Gayle, 2003). Within social systems “normative backwards-looking processes” become more valuable than “utilitarian forward-looking processes” by increasing social capital and trust (Birnbaum, 2004). Observers caution that creating a culture of deference upon which effective decision making relies entirely on the trust of key individuals takes the model of building trust too far, leaving the organization exposed during times of transition or changing circumstances (Minor & Tierney, 2005). Instead governance should remain fluid, moving on to new networks, constructs, and relationships based on the changing context presented by the environment of each participant. Trust is based on the shared history and values of individuals and must be frequently rebuilt as relationships change.

To establish this trust, social networks must be built between those with a shared stake or shared influence over key goals or areas of operation. Confidence building must occur by triggering meaningful communication that continues over time between communities of equals (Gayle, 2003). In discussing governance needs of the 21st century Gayle (2003) felt that “conflicting views can be discussed more productively more productively within, rather than

across, networks of collegiality, where it may be possible to fold multiple points of view together while connecting past realities to an increasingly consensual vision of the future.” Critics may contend that the consultative discussions prescribed by social networks will slow decision-making. Birnbaum (2004) cautions us that the speed “that makes it possible to make good decisions more quickly also makes it possible to make bad decisions more quickly.” Despite the necessary time and effort, administrators should actively seek out partners or reinforce informal networks that arise around activities or goals that will help their institution achieve balance and shared purpose to enable continued effective entrepreneurialism. Trust based communities and networks will provide more value to effective decision making in the entrepreneurial arena than traditional governance structures or formal hierarchy.

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