

2 State of the Art

Higher education research has become increasingly relevant and popular throughout the last decades. The United States were first to do substantial amounts of research on various aspects of higher education institutions, among them also the leadership of universities in the United States. This far, there are hardly any empirically based studies on the leadership of German universities. Why is that? Two reasons can be identified. Firstly, German higher education research is far more focused on the university as a whole (e.g. Wilkesmann/Schmidt 2012) and, if specific actors are the research subjects it is usually the students (e.g. Leuze/Lörz 2016; Shavit et al. 2007), the professors (e.g. Schimank 2015; Stichweh 2013), or the boards of trustees (e.g. Bogumil et al. 2007). Secondly, German university presidents do not talk about their office a lot in public and, unlike their American counterparts, even less do they publish about it (e.g. Bowen 2013; Philipson 1979).

This chapter shall give an overview of the relevant publications regarding the issues of my own study. I will start with a brief discussion on what kind of organization universities are, followed by highlighting the role of shared governance as the dominant participation mechanism in higher education institutions. Then I will turn to collegiality within universities i.e. negotiations among equals as the traditional ideal of decision-making among professors. I will then turn and conclude this chapter with the subject of my research, the university presidents and what we know about them this far.

2.1 Universities as Organizations, Shared Governance, and Collegiality

The organization of universities can not be understood without thorough consideration of shared governance and the institution's collegiality. This sub-chapter is highlighting the ideal of universities as republics of scholars on the one hand and the demand towards universities to become more like corporations on the other in order to carve out the ambiguous demands towards universities and, hence, the university presidents. Furthermore, shared governance as the mode of governance and collegiality as the mode of decision-making are discussed.

2.1.1 *What Kind of Organizations are Universities?*

Even though higher education research is a research field with great popularity in the United States and with growing popularity in Europe there is no single theory

or theoretical concept that provides a final answer to the question “What kind of organization is a university?” Why is it so difficult to find theories that grasp the decision-making and the leadership level of universities adequately?

Universities are regarded as complex systems with countless interests that cannot always be explained rationally. The “university as an organized anarchy” model (Cohen et al. 1972), in particular, has contributed to this perspective. According to this model actors, problems, solutions, and decision-making are coincidental, without any observable logic and leading to an organized anarchy. However, this model is contested by stating that there is a “method to the madness” (Neuberger 1995: 33; own transl.): anarchy is organized, and it is organization through which anarchy emerges and persists (Neuberger 1995).

In addition, various authors (Millett 1962; Goodman 1962; Clark 1972) stress the importance of “collegial traditions”: shared governance and consensus (as opposed to centralized decision-making and enforcement) are entrenched in a common set of norms and values shared among the members of the institution’s scientific community as well as in their institutional environment. Baldrige (1971a,b) and Salancik/Pfeffer (1974) highlight the political nature of decision-making processes in universities. They state that universities are places of conflict and power relationships that need to be borne in mind if one seeks to explain the negotiation processes and the political exchanges that structure decision-making therein. Thus, not surprisingly, most authors stress that universities are “special organizations” (e.g. Musselin 2007), “communities of professionals” (Stichweh 2005) led by a president that acts as ‘*primus inter pares*’, and informed by collegiality and academic self-administration as their original mode of governance.³

However, this democratic ideal with its emphasis on participatory forms of governance is in stark contrast to another ideal, namely the business-enterprise model, which demands a completely different mode of governance shaped by centralized, hierarchical structures of decision-making, the inclusion of external stakeholders, and presidents acting as top-level managers of their universities (Dill 2012; Power 2007). While the democratic ideal is still an important source of legitimation among university members, the last two decades have seen a significant “transition from ‘collegial’ to ‘managerial’ modes of governance (Leach 2008: 16) in Europe and North America (de Boer/Denters 1998; Kovac et al. 2003; Mora 2001; Shattock 2002).

³ In higher education research Weber’s ideal model of the rational-bureaucratic organization is usually referred to when discussing the special features of higher education institutions, especially the well-known descriptions of universities as being organized as “garbage cans” and “organized anarchies” (Cohen et al. 1972) and as being “loosely coupled” (Weick 1976).

Universities as a Republic of Scholars – the Democratic Ideal and Collegiality

The democratic ideal, also called “universities as a republic of scholars” (e.g. Bleiklie/Kogan 2007) usually refers to the 1960s and 1970s when also German universities were forced to implement more participatory models of internal governance due to student protests geared against the perceived illegitimacy of hierarchies rule in German universities.⁴

The concept is based on the ideal of autonomous university members. The members of the university are the students, the academic faculty⁵, and the professors. However, in Germany the committees of shared governance are assembled in a way that ensures the 'status-group' of the professors the majority of the seats therein. Therefore, the university members are not equal concerning their participation in university affairs, and the notion of democracy merely hints at the fact that there are elections. Even though some German universities introduced equal participation during the 1960s and 1970s this was revoked by the German Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) in the 1970s. The court ruled that the professors have to have the majority of votes in all of the committees of academic self-administration and thereby we can refer to universities as ‘democratic’ but more in a sense of an estate-based society than in a sense of a democratic society where everyone holds equal rights and is recognized as equal among all of the university members⁶. Accordingly, authors recurring to the democratic ideal tend to focus on professorial autonomy not only over research and teaching but also in terms of academic self-administration through collegial bodies in which the professors represent the majority group.

Furthermore, the democratic ideal is rooted in the idea that academic freedom and institutional autonomy cannot be viewed as two distinct features instead, they are “two sides of the same coin” (Bleiklie/Kogan 2007). Humboldt is often referred to as an origin of this perspective even though he focused much more on teacher-student relationships and his notion of autonomy was largely restricted to the freedom from interference of state authorities (Humboldt 1809/10). Autonomy

⁴ Actually the concept of university as a republic of scholars dates back much further than the 1960s (Rüegg 1993, 2011), but for the sake of brevity I will not discuss the historical dimension of the concept here. In Germany the concept became widely known through Simmel (1964).

⁵ Academic faculty here refers to the academic staff in a university below the position of professor.

⁶ There are further far-reaching consequences with this court ruling. In fact the German Federal Constitutional Court considered German universities to be political institutions by this decision. Professors are not participating in self-administration as experts for research and teaching but as a political interest group, a stakeholder among many. For a more elaborate discussion see Hüther 2010.

in the democratic ideal, however, does not only stress independence from state authorities, it is also strongly intertwined with the notion of collegial decision-making based on collegial democratically elected self-governing bodies. Thereby it follows that the university leader, be it a 'president' or a 'rector', is regarded as a 'primus inter pares', i.e. a colleague who is heading the higher education institution for a restricted period. Furthermore, the university president is expected not to act solely based on their own judgment and interests but instead in close consultation with the colleagues represented in the committees of academic self-administration.

Hence, power in the so called 'republic of scholars' is "vested in the professoriate, both regarding major decisions and the management of daily affairs" (Bleiklie/Kogan 2007: 478). Change should grow "organically from below" (Elton 2008: 228) since autonomous universities and participatory democracy are suggested to offer the possibility "to decide to change on the basis of consensus that should somehow emerge without any need for hierarchy or even leadership" (Dearlove 1995: 162). Of course, consensual decisions are not always easily achieved. Instead, academic faculty members who do not act in a collegial fashion, choosing to promote their own interests in disregard of institution wide concerns (Dearlove 1995; Schimank 2001: 233), can easily threaten the decision-making process. Further difficulties in academic decision-making arise when an interplay of influence strategies occurs in case of conflict (Bourgeois/Nizet 1993). Nevertheless, self-governed institutions such as universities incorporate collegial decision-making processes no matter how ineffective they might appear in terms of managerial goals like efficiency or promptness of decisions. The consultation of collegial bodies is superior to other needs in such self-governed institutions (Noble/Pym 1970), even if it leads to "bottom-heavy consent organizations (Dearlove 1995: 167).

Universities as Stakeholder Organizations – the Business-Enterprise Ideal

The business-enterprise ideal derives from a debate geared at the perceived lack of both efficacy and efficiency in the operation of universities, for which the introduction of business leadership and management models is suggested as an antidote (Reponen 1999; de Boer 2003; Leach 2008). In the wake of "the rise of the managerial approach to steering" (Paradeise et al. 2009: 198) higher education institutions have been urged to abandon or at least limit participative governance and encouraged to move towards more executive models of management. These concepts have been legally imposed on universities by national governments all over Europe. The European Commission (COM(2011) 567/2) states clearly the need for shifting power relations away from the democratically elected collegial committees of academic self-administration towards institutional executives such

as the deans and the university leaders. Furthermore, the necessity of external control mechanisms, like boards of trustees, is stressed (de Boer 2003: 91).

The impact of these New Public Management inspired reforms upon universities has been described by various authors for the international (e.g. Deem/Brehony 2005) as well as for the German context (e.g. Schimank 2005). New Public Management mechanisms are widely perceived as being imposed upon higher education institutions from the outside and not internally generated at all (e. g. Deem/Brehony 2005: 225); therefore, they had to be imposed through legal reforms (de Boer 2003: 92). The resulting multilevel governance model is “characterized by the redesign of jurisdictions and steering rules between public authorities and universities” (Paradeise et al. 2009: 197).

The effects of New Public Management measures and New Managerialism on the higher education landscape are critically discussed nationally as well as internationally. Criticisms start usually with a reference to the success story of universities throughout hundreds of years (Schimank 2005) as steadily growing in size and number and as the major contributor to modernization. Moreover, universities are said to constitute “the backbone of academia” which is subordinated to the academic profession (Schimank 2005: 361). The academic profession shall not only take care of academic affairs but of administrative affairs in universities as well – a notion maybe best captured in Parsons statement that universities are “organizations essentially run by academics, even more than hospitals are run by medical doctors” (Parsons/Platt 1973). Demands of professionalization and more effective management and decision-making structures as well as of clearly assigned responsibilities pose a danger to this perception of self-governed and thereby autonomous universities.

Clark’s concept of the “entrepreneurial university” is among the best-known publications on university organization. However, he is misunderstood. Clark argues that higher education institutions are confronted with new demands that they can neither handle nor satisfy because of their “traditional form” (Clark 2001: 10). Those demands regard mainly the lacking efficiency of decision-making, the assignment of responsibilities, and the growing pressure to raise external funding, since national funding is declining. This “demand-response imbalance” (Clark 2001: 10) leads to a growing institutional insufficiency which demonstrates that universities are unable to cope with changing environments. This imbalance, Clark argues, cannot be solved by reforms on the national level; instead, the universities themselves have to take adequate actions towards reforming themselves. Clark calls for establishing “entrepreneurial leadership” and that requires “institutional autonomy” (Clark 2001: 11). The concept of the entrepreneurial university serves as an “umbrella idea that embraces the self-steering, self-reliant, progressive university” (Clark 2001: 23). Progress, he states, is not possible within the boundaries

of the traditional university. Change and the pursuit of opportunities require changes in steering and organization that should result in a strengthened steering core and an expanded administrative body.

However, Clark's 'entrepreneurial university' does not intend to incorporate business-like structures into universities. Universities should have an organizational form that "mediates between the state and the market" (Clark 2001: 23) rather than being dominated by one of them. Therefore, Clark also emphasizes the collegial character entrenched in higher education institutions: "Unlike traditional business firms and traditional governmental departments, the collegial forms must function strongly around personal forms of governance and generally come to be seen as dominating them, particularly at the center. Given the clout of faculty [...] the 'we' has to dominate the 'I'. Entrepreneurialism in universities has to be seen as collegial entrepreneurialism" (Clark 2001: 15). Even though Clark accepts the notion of collegiality in universities, he states clearly that collegiality usually serves as a "defensive ideology" that is "biased in favor of the status quo, even the status quo ante" (Clark 2001: 18). Therefore, collegiality has to be rebuilt as "joint participation of faculty and administrators in a strengthened steering core" (Clark 2001: 18) since "the work does not get done unless the various local academic tribes do it" (Clark 2001: 22).

In popular higher education policy journals like the German journal 'Forschung und Lehre' that covers issues in the German university landscape in a popular fashion it is often argued that changing environmental circumstances result in changes for the role of German university presidents (Seel 2007). Before the wave of reforms had hit the German higher education institutions, the university president's major task was to provide good working conditions for the academic faculty as well as for the students. Now universities are said to be "transformed into special companies" (Seel 2007: 16; own translation), and that has major consequences on various levels. Those "special companies" are characterized as "increasingly tightly organized, often controlled by influential boards and competing with one another for shares of the national and international knowledge market" (Seel 2007: 16; own translation; Fraune 2012). New kinds of performance measurements that guide contemporary universities, such as: Third party funding, the number of Bachelor, Master and PhD students, numerous rankings, quantitative teaching evaluations, and the number of institutionalized international cooperations are expressions of that development. This, however, might turn out to be self-destructive for universities in the end since the original mode of scientific competition is the dispute about the best explanation or interpretation of phenomena. Competing along those economic parameters hardly contributes to innovations in science and teaching and is thereby destructive for the actual mission of universities: teaching and research (Welpe et al. 2015).

Many scholars criticize the creation of powerful managerial infrastructures in higher education (e.g. Bleiklie/Kogan 2007). These are said to parallel and to some extent replace the old structures, which are committees of academic self-administration, deans, etc. Fears of a reversal of legitimacy raise since the “collegial decision-making bodies have [...] become part of top-down decision-making structures” (Bleiklie/Kogan 2007: 488).

A recurring theme in higher education research as much as in the debate about managerial universities is 'autonomy'. Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) stress that “autonomy” is one of the guiding principles in both lines of discussion, the “republic of scholars” as well as the “stakeholder university” ideal. While autonomy in the democratic ideal is discussed as individual autonomy of the professoriate (e.g. academic freedom, freedom from external interference into internal affairs), autonomy in the business-enterprise ideal is about institutional autonomy. Without institutional autonomy strategic decision-making would be impossible to achieve. Therefore, leadership in the stakeholder university is not so much concerned with the needs of academia; instead their primary aim is to satisfy the needs and demands of internal as well external stakeholders. The universities' academic faculty is thus considered just one of many voices. Power is not a shared or a collegial matter anymore, power becomes hierarchical and vested in the stakeholders when major decisions have to be made. Likewise, leaders are not ‘primi inter pares’ anymore but chief executives backed by professional managerial structures that support both change processes and daily affairs (Bleiklie/Kogan 2007).

2.1.2 Shared Governance in Universities

Shared Governance, also referred to as the “federal principle of higher education” (Rothblatt 1987: 151), is intimately linked to the concept of collegiality in universities because it incorporates the community of scholars idea and transfers it into university governance. The normativity of universities is frequently put forward when shared governance and collegiality are concerned (Birnbbaum 2004). Among the normative core values of higher education institutions, not only collegiality among professors is mentioned but also reliability and trust instead of efficiency and speed as in market institutions (Birnbbaum 2004: 5).

However, shared, participatory governance has become a major focus of criticism, as proponents of managerial university governance denounce it as inappropriate for today's environmental challenges that require prompt decisions and actions (Stensaker 2012; Benjamin et al. 1993; Kennedy 1994; Schuster et al. 1994) “never has the need for effective academic governance been greater than today” (Leach 2008: 3). The National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges in the United States describe the perceived need for a change towards more managerial governance in the harshest words:

“[Higher Education] Institutions ignore a changing environment at their peril. Like dinosaurs, they risk becoming exhibits in a kind of cultural Jurassic Park: places of great interest and curiosity, increasingly irrelevant in a world that has passed them by. Higher education cannot afford to let this happen” (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Colleges 1996).

But what does “*shared governance*” at universities actually mean? Definitions vary due to the high level of diversification in higher education with its deeply rooted national and institutional traditions. Among those the highly diversified higher education landscape is put forward depending on national as well as institutional traditions and their history (Clark 1972, 1983; Amaral et al. 2003; Birnbaum 2004). However, a tentative attempt at characterization can be made. On a general level, shared governance can be described as

“a form of steering beyond state influence, in which societal influence is secured through various networks or other steering arrangements” (Treib et al. 2007: 3) and through “means and actions by which a collective entity decides matters of policy and strategy” (Kaplan 2004: 23).

These governance systems are “understood to consist of the explicit and implicit procedures that allocate to various participants the authority and responsibility for making institutional decisions” (Kaplan 2004: 23; Hirsch/Weber 2001; Benjamin 1993). For higher education it has been defined as “the system, composed of structures and processes, through which faculty, administrators, and other campus constituents make collective institutional decisions” (IMHC/OECD 1999).

In practice though, there are vast differences in the degree of involvement especially of academic faculty. Minor (2003) distinguishes between academics involved in all decision-making processes, academics involvement only with regards to academic affairs, and minor influence of academics on decision-making processes (Minor 2003: 962). Historically, nationally, and locally, there have been different waves and degrees of decision-making involvement of academic faculty (Birnbaum 1992). The latest “democratic revolution” occurred during the 1960’s and 1970’s when universities opened up for participation of new actors: the students (de Boer/Stensaker 2007). The guiding idea was that decision-making powers should not be concentrated but diffused and separated among the several groups of university members (de Boer/Denters 1999). In Germany the status-group of the professors represents the majority in every committee of academic self-administration, while other status groups are represented only in a minority position.

Different models of shared governance have been developed. The following table outlines their characteristics in terms of decision-making and diversity of actors.

Table 1: A framework for analyzing the role of shared governance in strategic change processes (in: Stensaker 2012: 7)

		Actors involved in institutional decision-making	
		Internal stakeholders	External stakeholders
Ways in which decisions are reached	formal	the representative democracy model	the corporate enterprise model
	informal	the collegial model	the entrepreneurial model

The representative democracy model emphasizes the “close relationship between students, administration and academic staff” and focuses on “the importance of and respect for formal rules and regulations” (de Boer/Stensaker 2007). The collegial model puts emphasis on perceiving culture, ownership and decisions based on consensus as central characteristics for strategic development (Clark 1972, 1983; Harvey 1995). The corporate enterprise model focuses on the representation of external stakeholders and actors in decision-making bodies, as they are considered key forces in improving the higher education institution’s links with the environment (Amaral et al. 2003). The entrepreneurial model stresses the need for dynamic leaders willing to take initiative and form coalitions for change and creating networks – internally as well as externally (Etzkowitz et al. 2000).

A special feature of self-governed organizations is that not only groups with formally secured legitimacy can influence decisions. These so called “working-groups” (Bieletzki 2012), “working-committees” (Bourgeois/Nizet 1993) or “specializing sub-committees” (Noble/Pym 1970) help towards providing effective decision-making. If they work successfully they restrict the number of choices for other, usually formal, committees academic self-administration by composing a paper making suggestions on what to decide (Bieletzki 2012). Moreover, these sub-committees provide an opportunity for exercising personal influence without membership in an influential formal committee and thereby serve to prevent negative consequences of unequal power distribution or unequal access to the few seats in the influential committees of self-administration. But, maybe more importantly, these non-formalized groups include a variety of university members contributing to the legitimization of reforms (Bourgeois/Nizet 1993) even though they are not formally legitimized (Bieletzki 2012).

It is not only the restriction of choices open to other committees and the inclusion of other university members or the nature of self-governed organizations that leads to instating working-groups. They are serve to counterbalance dysfunctional elements to be found within the formal committees of academic self-administration. Especially for the context of German universities Schimank (2001) introduced the concept of “factual no-aggression pacts” (Schimank 2001: 233) to describe the internal politics of the formal committees of academic self-administration. These, he argues, often prevent decisions which could potentially harm a “colleague”. The norm of collegiality prevents majority votes because they could possibly result in conflict among the professors, in that an overruled professor might take revenge once he has the opportunity to do so. This situation leads to consensus-based decisions that usually turn out to be rather weak and mostly reaffirm the status quo (Schimank 2001).

Instating working-groups tackles several issues. On one hand, they can be used for highlighting the consultative role of academic faculty for helping to solve a problem or for sharing advice on some significant issues and then they dissolve (Keller 2004). On the other hand, professors (and other staff) many be experts and very knowledgeable persons on diverse issues, who, once their attention is captured for a special purpose and they are given the entire necessary information, can provide invaluable counsel and suggestions (Keller 2004). Moreover, informal interaction outside the hierarchical structure and beyond designated roles is viewed as crucial for success (Lee 1991) in that they part of an inclusive approach that increases the likelihood of valuable input for decisions (Williams et al. 1987).

Various modes of decision-making have been identified within shared governance arrangements in universities, among others the following three: fully collaborative decision-making, consultative decision-making, and distributed decision-making. Fully collaborative decision-making is closest to what might be called a “collegial model”. The academic faculty reaches decisions jointly and strives for consensus. Consultative decision-making assigns the academic faculty a role where their opinion and advice is sought but authority remains at the leadership level. The model revolves around information sharing and discussion rather than joint-decision-making. Finally, distributed decision-making refers to a model where decisions are made by groups assigned to specific issues. The understanding is that academic faculty has a right to make decisions only in certain areas, and the university president and the board of trustees in others (Tierney/Minor 2003).

Criticisms of Shared Governance: Is it Necessary or Not?

Whether or not shared governance is indispensable is an issue in numerous papers concerned with shared governance in universities.

Birnbaum (2004) argues strongly in favor of shared governance and the involvement of academic faculty for maintaining an atmosphere of thorough discussion and for the sake of stability. "Faculty involvement in shared governance may slow down the decision-making process, but it also assures more thorough discussion and provides the institution with a sense of order and stability" (Birnbaum 2004: 5-6; Kerr 1963). In contrast, other scholars perceive shared governance as unsuitable for tackling today's challenges for these very reasons:

"Broad participation in university governance is hampered by bureaucratic policies, procedures, and practices, as well as by the anarchy of committee and consensus decision making [...]. The academic tradition of extensive consultation, debate, and consensus building before any substantive decision is made or action taken poses a particular challenge in this regard because this process is frequently incapable of keeping pace with the profound changes occurring [in] higher education" (Duderstadt 2004: 142).

But even critics stress that the principle of subsidiarity is characteristic in higher education governance and that centralization would be "a very awkward approach to higher education" (Duderstadt 2004: 14). Leach (2008) points to the legitimacy of policy decisions that can only be assured through shared governance (Leach 2008: 12). Similarly Mortimer and Sathre (2007) argue that

"authority and power need to be distributed in ways that ensure that those who have the relevant expertise and competence are in decisive roles. In addition those who are concerned about the issue, those whose cooperation is necessary to implement it [...] have legitimate claims to participate" (Mortimer/Sarthe 2007: 24).

Functionalist arguments can be put forward as well. Professional organizations are particularly vulnerable to hierarchical steering because of problems regarding information and control. Research and teaching can be considered as unclear technologies (Cohen et al. 1972) and as such control can hardly be exercised.

For decades the inclusion of various internal stakeholder groups became vigorously criticized as unsuitable for taking tough decisions and "too slow in a situation requiring more dynamic decision-making" (Kaplan 2004). However, advocates of shared governance stress its social dimension as personal relationships often develop through participation in committees or by being consulted as an expert (Kezar 2004). Interpersonal relationships, the level of mutual trust in decision-making processes, and a feeling of ownership are of great significance in effective shared governance arrangements if decisions shall be accepted (Kezar 2004). Moreover, strong group motivation and wide-spread committee membership are said to be very significant factors in improving university governance (Baldridge

1971b, 1982; Birnbaum 1992; Dill/Helm 1988; Mortimer/McConnell 1979; Schuster et al. 1994). Therefore, shared governance is “not only a means, but an important end in itself” (Albert/Whetten 1985; Dill 2012).

Birnbaum (2004: 12) hints at the necessity of “procedural justice” through shared governance where decisions are legitimized in the committees of academic self-administration. This probably explains de Boer’s (2009) finding of a remarkable persistence of “informal processes and rules [guiding] the academic staff despite numerous reforms and reform attempts” (de Boer 2009: 234). Therefore, it seems that specific “cultural conditions may trump structural arrangements” (Kaplan 2004: 32).

Proponents of more managerial universities try to push academic decision-making towards a situation where academics involved in shared governance are supposed to act more as consultants in advisory councils instead of being collaborators in the decision-making process itself⁷ (Tierney/Minor 2003). The more consultative role of faculty senates can be seen as the flipside of the increasing involvement of external stakeholder in higher education which is backed up by legislative reforms that transferred rights to external authorities like the boards of trustees. It has been criticized that academic governance is becoming corporate because decision-making models “mimic the centralized powers of corporate management in the for-profit sector” (Kaplan 2004: 24). This does not only refer to the introduction of boards of trustees who are said to embed new demands and interests (Stichweh 2005: 130) but it also hints at the increasing importance of quality assurance and controlling structures in universities. These new structures were meant to tackle the well-known problem of hierarchical models of governance: the control and information deficit which are particularly obvious in universities (Hüther/Krücken 2016: pp. 138; Kamm 2014: 116).

The Role of Academic Senates in Shared University Governance

Academic senates are said to be the cornerstone of shared university governance. Their scope of influence varies according to the respective laws and regulations. I am assuming that the way university presidents picture their respective academic senate influences their scope of action. Minor (2003) distinguishes four types of academic senates according to their scope of influence.

(1) **Traditional senates:** In the traditional conception of senates they serve to preserve and represent the interests of the academic faculty in decision-making

⁷ The consequence of this process can be described best with the following anecdote: „In 2001, members of the faculty senate at the University of Notre Dame were so disenchanted with their lack of authority they voted to dissolve the senate. Of course, being a purely advisory body, the senate lacked the authority to dissolve itself, and when the senate reconvened the following year, it revoked its prior decision” (Leach 2008; Kellogg 2001).

processes. They decide on academic matters like the curriculum, promotion, and tenure. The influence on not strictly academic issues like the budget, external relations, strategic planning, and development are legally limited.

(2) **Influential senates** hold decision-making powers also on those just mentioned nonacademic subjects. They can be assertive and advance topics of institution wide concern. Moreover,

“they are viewed by other governing constituencies as a legitimate integrated governing body of the campus and as having the ability to create change” (Minor 2003: 964).

(3) **Dormant senates** are inactive, they do not participate in decision-making and are not considered a factor in university decision-making. Academic faculty may exercise influence only through alternative means.

(4) **Cultural senates** arise due to a lack of structural, formal rigidity. As the members of the senate change so does the senate and the role it plays in decision-making. This structural ineffectiveness “can lead to 'deal cutting' that circumvents formal processes of the senate” (Minor 2003: 964).

The formal scope of influence of academic senates varies nationally and internationally with legal regulations; the informal scope of influence varies with leadership style. While some critics emphasize the lack of seriousness of academic senates and the lacking promptness of decisions:

“Large faculty senates are frequently quarrel pits, garbage cans for the disposal of personal grievances, and platforms for harangues. Many members are in reality lobbyists for their own disciplines, schools, or ideological causes. And the pace is often snail-like” (Keller 2004: 163).

Others hint at the lacking legal authority of academic senates because “effective shared governance requires faculty to have sufficient voice and influence to participate meaningfully in policy matters” (Leach 2008: 20). In particular the growing number of more or less advisory academic senates is criticized as not being sufficiently attractive for engaging in it. It is highlighted that the academic faculty needs executive authority for attracting the participation and expertise of the faculty (Duderstadt 2004; Gaff 2007).

Furthermore, academic senates are said to have symbolic purposes. They symbolize institutional membership, the collective and individual faculty commitment to professional values, and joint faculty-administration thus signifies the acceptance of existing authority relationships (Birnbaum 1989b: 428). In addition, academic senates can serve as scapegoats since

“a president is unlikely to blame an existing institutional failure on weak presidential performance, and a board of trustees is not likely to accept a president's argument that a certain task cannot be performed because it is beyond the capabilities of a loosely coupled system. On the other hand, boards can understand a president's assertion that a specific act was made difficult or impossible because of opposition by the senate and may even entertain a claim that it would be impossible to implement a program because of the likelihood of future senate opposition” (Birnbaum 1989b: 437).

In such cases the academic senate helps university presidents to convey the complexity and supposed inevitability of delaying or abandoning reform plans because they can hint at senators for whom academic senates are said to offer “deviant faculty a legitimized opportunity to vent their grievances and solicit potential support” (Birnbaum 1989b: 431).

Criticisms of Shared Governance in German Universities

Various authors concerned with higher education research have criticized the modes of decision-making through the various committees of academic self-administration. In particular, the academic senates have been described as weak, ineffective, “an empty forum” (Baldridge 1982), “slowly collapsing and becoming dormant” (Keller 1983: 61), “purely ceremonial” (Minor 2003), as “committees-for-the-sifting-of-sawdust” (Veblen 1918: 212), as “a place where one can meet friends, engage in political intrigues, gossip about the administration, and complain about parking” (Birnbaum 1989b: 437) and as a committee to “keep people busy, occasionally entertain them, give them a variety of experiences, keep them off the streets, provide pretexts for storytelling, and allow socializing” (Weick 1979: 264).

One of the main criticisms among German higher education researchers about shared governance is that facts are further complicated by mixing them up with internal university issues. Balancing those conflicting interest and reaching compromise in consideration of those mingled interests results in decisions that are based on the lowest common denominator (Schimank/Lange 2009). Shared governance, therefore, is deemed a weak basis for decision-making in times when reforms in higher education legislation are aimed at increasing the accountability of universities for their own actions (Krücken/Meier 2006; Whitley 2008; Meier 2009). The situation is further complicated due to the specific status-group participation regulations in German academic self-administration where the professors always hold the majority and the other status-groups hold minority positions (Hüther 2010: pp. 64).

However, decisions by the committees of academic self-administration usually are still considered legitimate and accepted independently from their qualitative results because they are reached through the collegial path of universitarian

decision-making (Hüther 2010). This serves two important purposes: Firstly, as vehicles for collective decision-making and, secondly, to exercise control of professional standards for example through decisions on admission of new members (Bleiklie 2004: 9). In this regard shared governance ensures the protection of institutional values (Bleiklie 2004).

In contrast, Breitbach (2009) argues that due to the fact that university presidents have been legally strengthened decisions would now be legitimized by the quality of the results instead of the legitimacy of the decision-making process. Hence, a shift from input to output orientation has occurred. If university presidents would use this strengthened position and make decisions on their own, without involving the committees of academic self-administration, there would be a smaller time gap towards decision-making in the presidential office and, hence, the production of visible results. Therefore, it is of great importance that university presidents gain trust for their decisions. And trust is vested in the norms and values of the institution (Birnbaum 2004). One way of gaining trust in the academic context is, according to Breitbach (2009), achieved by using expertise. Universities have a large number of experts on manifold issues encompassing a broad range of academic disciplines. University presidents should use that by involving them in the decision-making process.

Implications of Shared Governance on Conducting Reforms

Shared governance is one of the special traits of the “special organization” of universities, and university presidents in Germany have to cope with it for achieving reforms. The various committees involved in decision-making, whether it is formally necessary or not, affect the choice of tools that university presidents may use to induce change in universities and exercise leadership (Musselin 2007). However, the community of scholars, the principle of collegiality and the persistence of shared governance are said to weaken the possibility to stick to formal structures and processes alone, and thereby “modify the exercise of leadership and the management of change within universities” (Musselin 2007: 74).

Formal structures and rules in universities do not serve to support hierarchical power when it comes to the implementation of reforms because the organization of a university goes far beyond formality and rules. Weick (1976; 1979) offers a concept of universities as being “loosely coupled”, i.e. consisting of small and independent units with a narrow central management. According to Weick, preserving the separateness of the units and disciplinary characteristics are distinct features of the loosely coupled nature of universities and result in weak management and organizational inversion. This concept focuses on the informal aspects of organizations which glue the loosely coupled subunits together. Therefore, it also emphasizes the scholarly strength within universities and it can be categorized

as belonging to the ‘republic of scholars’ ideal even if the notion of a ‘community’ is rather marginal. However, loose coupling also means that managerially enforced changes in one department might not have any effect on another one and diffusion is not likely to occur because the many parts of an organizations can persist despite changes in the environment.

So how can leadership be exercised in such a setting (if possible at all)? What are the implications following from the specifics of universities? It has been argued in the context of French universities that a “sense of community” has to be maintained when initiating reforms. According to Musselin (2007) French university leaders present big projects within an even bigger rhetoric “arguing that such an evolution is inevitable, that everything pushes in this direction, that it is a priority for the future, etc.” (Musselin 2007: 77). French university presidents avoid exclusion as well as sanctions instead they “find ways to convince those who are opposed” (Musselin 2007: 77). This results in constant repetition of the necessity of the respective reform project whenever and wherever university presidents are given the opportunity.⁸

Furthermore, imposing orders and decisions in universities is “more unproductive than anywhere else” (Musselin 2007: 78). Three reasons are usually put forward for this argument: a) weak hierarchies due to loose coupling (Weick 1976; 1979), b) that innovation and change strongly rely on the willingness of the bottom level (Noble/Pym 1970) and the university members in general, and c) that directives lead to reactions from the “defensive territories” (Musselin 2009: 187) which are the formal structures “that become visible each time they are threatened” (Musselin 2009: 178). Consequently, managing change in universities does not rely so much on top-down decisions and their implementation. Instead change processes should be fed from the bottom and reframed for becoming compatible with university-wide demands.

Summary and Conclusions on Shared Governance

Shared governance aims at two goals: “making good decisions and getting those subject to those systems to accept the decisions as legitimate” (Birnbaum 2004: 12). Proposals to change shared governance are usually supported by supposedly rational claims of cause and effect. It is assumed that changing governance structures will lead to greater performance of the overall institution especially with regards to promptness of decisions. In contrast, advocates of shared governance argue that faculty participation is a cornerstone of the normative basis of universities

⁸ It is important to note that this is not only occurring in universities but also in corporations (see Courpasson 2000).

and “embedded in the socialization and expectations of the participants” (Birnbaum 2004: 10). Not formal rules and processes are required for university governance instead the incorporation of informal norms and values.

Procedural justice, the “perceived fairness of the process through which organizational decisions are made” (Birnbaum 2004: 12), is of great importance in shared governance arrangements in universities. The process of how decisions are reached is what matters most in “process cultures” (Deal/Kennedy 1982) like academic entities. If decisions are made “the right way”, they are more likely to be considered legitimate which in turn leads to compliance with the consequences that follow. What the academic faculty in higher education institutions believes to be “the right way” is a matter of socialization through which they have come to share similar beliefs and values (Tyler 1990). The structures as well as the processes of shared governance assign rights to the academic faculty to participate in decision-making which in turn validates their status as important and respected members of the university.

Even in Clark’s conception of the “entrepreneurial university” substantial collegial participation is a requirement. He states that, “faculty expect to be in charge of decision making in departments, and in the larger facilities that group departments, and to have a significant voice in decision making at the center of the university” (Clark 2001: 22). Of course he hints at the common criticism that the broad involvement of academic faculty, students, and professors leads to universities to become “relatively slow moving, resistant to change, and devoted to the status quo” (Clark 2001: 22). Nevertheless, the need of the university members to be involved in change processes must be acknowledged if a change-friendly environment is to be achieved. “Agency of those inside the university” is one way of doing so (Clark 2001: 23) if one wants to avoid “decisions [to] become lost in a welter of committees” (Clark 2001: 22).

In this study shared governance matters because the formal governance structures which were reformed during the last decades might not reflect the actual decision-making structures that are chosen by university presidents in Germany when they introduce and implement reform projects. Moreover, it is suggested that shared governance enables the institutionalization of reforms with greater impact (Curry 1992) and creates arenas for dissent and debate (Walker 1979) which enhances the likeliness of reform implementation (Levine 1980). Due to shared governance arrangements the academic faculty becomes involved (Rosovsky 1990). Without the involvement of academic faculty and support, it is suggested that change within universities does not last and will not have significant impact (Birnbaum 1992; Walker 1979). Therefore, faculty involvement by means of shared governance might be of great importance for German university presidents when implementing reforms at their respective universities. It is intimately linked to the

concept of power in terms of “who is in charge, who makes decisions, who has a voice, and how loud [is] that voice” (Rosovsky 1990: 261). In higher education institutions shared governance ensures the influence not only of the academic staff in several decision-making processes but also of other stakeholders like the boards of trustees and the federal states. And finding out about how not only the long established committees of academic self-administration need to be convinced of reform projects by university presidents but also external stakeholders like the boards of trustees and the federal state ministries of science is one of the main goals of this study.

2.1.3 The Concept of Collegiality at Universities

I have just unfolded the argument that shared governance viewed as the decision-making arena, and collegiality as the mode of decision-making among equals within shared governance, appear to be interconnected. But what else does collegiality mean in universities? It has been put forward that the committees of academic self-administration are the place where collegiality is exercised, and it appears as if change in universities can only be accomplished by including both the formal and the informal groups in academic self-governance (Hüther 2010; Lewis 2005). Universities have often been described as ‘collegial organizations’ by tradition and ‘collegiality’ is continuously presented as a core-characteristic in descriptions of university governance (de Boer 2003; Bleiklie/Kogan 2007).

Weber has noted on the collegial principle that it can serve to restrict hierarchy (Weber 1976) but just a few pages later he remarks,

Collegiality almost inevitably involves obstacles to precise, clear, and above all, rapid decisions [...] With the progressive increase in the necessity for rapid decision and action, however, the importance of this type of collegiality has declined⁹ (Weber 1978: 227).

My focus here will be the process of decision-making and reform implementation by university presidents and in this context structure matters but process is defines how influence is exerted. This far, studies on collegiality in universities have emphasized the cultural and symbolic value of collegiality and on varying degrees of centralization in decision-making (Chaffee 1983, Dill 2012; Dill/Helm 1988, Tierney 2003). When considered as a structural element of universities, collegiality is described as “decentralization within the subunit” (Hardy 1996: 166) with a high degree of influence on behalf of the faculty members (Tapper/Palfreyman 2010). Collegiality, here, is the opposite of bureaucracy which is centralized, with little

⁹ „Kollegialität [...] bedeutet, fast unvermeidlich, eine Hemmung präziser und eindeutiger, vor allem schneller Entschlüsse“ (Weber 1976: 162)

faculty participation, and bound to rules and fixed procedures (Hardy 1996). Moreover, collegiality and consensus among academic faculty are often equaled (Chaffee 1983; Tapper/Palfreyman 2010) and collegiality has been described as a prerequisite for delivering “high-quality academic goals” (Tapper/Palfreyman 2010).

In the German context collegiality and university governance have not been analyzed to a large extend, therefore I will be working the following definition: Collegiality is “a specific kind of coordination, based on actions of equal actors who act during negotiations on the basis of a mutually agreed set of norms that encompasses a strong consensus orientation and leads, in the end, to unanimity among the professors” (Hüther 2010: 23; own translation)¹⁰.

In higher education research the issue of collegiality in universities has been discussed more or less extensively in the 1970s, the 1990s, and again since the late 2000s. Although there is considerable confusion between collegiality as a mode of decision-making and shared governance as the arena for decision-making, they often remain intertwined. While in the 1970s the debate revolved mainly around just emphasizing the existence of collegiality in university and highlighting its aspects the publications of the 1990s emphasize collegiality in defense against the perceived threats of new public management. Throughout the last fifteen years collegiality has had a small revival again in that it has served to underline why managerialism is not successful in universities. I will focus on studies combining shared governance and collegiality in higher education that provide useful ideas for my own study.

Noble and Pym (1970) draw on Max Weber’s insights of collegiality to show how collegial arrangements influence decision-making processes in universities. In particular, organizations which are self-governed tend to incorporate collegial decision-making processes no matter how ineffective this may seem according to general management goals of “efficiency”. They argue that collegiality and thereby the consultation of the collegial bodies is superior to other needs in certain organizations. In order to achieve this, discussions can be delegated to “specializing sub-committees” (Noble/Pym 1970: 436) composed of university members. These enjoy great legitimacy even though they are not having any legitimacy grounded in the organization’s legal framework. Noble and Pym also raise the issue of unequal power distribution within the collegial body since “one of the main

¹⁰ „Kollegialität rekuriert demnach auf eine bestimmte Art der Koordination, die darauf beruht, dass gleichberechtigte Akteure ihre Handlungen im Rahmen von Verhandlungen aufeinander abstimmen, und auf ein informelles Normenset, das eine starke Konsensorientierung beinhaltet und letztlich auf Einstimmigkeit innerhalb der Professorenschaft hinausläuft.“ (Hüther 2010: 23)

sources of personal influence in a community of status equals is membership in an influential committee” (Noble/Pym 1970: 438).

Bourgeois and Nizet (1993) point to the difficulties in academic decision-making within universities which, according to them, arise primarily from an interplay of influence strategies used by the contesting parties when conflict arises especially in the committees of academic self-administration. The authors do, however, identify collegial processes that accompany academic decision-making which are occurring outside the usual committees of academic self-governance. They highlight the importance of “working-committees” (Bourgeois/Nizet 1993) as arenas in which reforms are designed and thereby equipped with legitimacy. However, as they point out, the rule of collegiality seems to be largely restricted to the status group of the professors.

Dearlove (1995) addresses the increasing reduction of collegial rule in favor of administrators and states that the idea of collegiality and academic self-government actually evolved around the perception that

“universities should be autonomous and governed by a participatory democracy of dons [...] where it is conceived as possible to decide to change on the basis of a consensus that should somehow emerge without any need for hierarchy or even leadership” (Dearlove 1995: 162).

In this vein, he argues that the internal affairs of universities should be decided on by the professors – not the administrators. Even though the amount of interconnected committees of academic self-governance has led to “bottom heavy organizations” (Dearlove 1995), this way of organizing is a necessity rooted in the collegial understanding of the academia. This does not, however, lead to fast consensus decisions. Instead, he observes, there are many academics who promote their own interests without any interest in institution-wide concerns. Nevertheless, he insists on collegiality being a “key aspect of the culture of universities” (Dearlove 1995: 166), something he perceives as being threatened by bureaucratic administrators. In a similar vein, but 15 years later, Tapper and Palfreyman (2010) reaffirm these arguments arguing against measures introduced by new public management into universities.

Something that has mostly been ignored in higher education research are the many rituals demonstrating collegiality and community of the academia in universities. “Old” universities in particular, tend to foster rituals that symbolize the norm of collegiality. For example, the bestowal to PhD graduates of gown that are similar to those of the professors can be read as a symbolic step towards the realm of professorial collegiality. Hence, it has been noted that collegiality serves as a “fourth pillar of performance” for being promoted towards a professorship, along-

side research, teaching, service in committees (Hatfield 2006). Historically inspired higher education research points to another aspect that goes mostly unnoticed: Collegiality and academic self-governance have been characteristics of universities ever since they were first established because academic self-governance was the mode of operating the universities of Bologna and Paris by the year 1200 (Rüegg 2011). Collegial solidarity was fostered by this equal status of the members of the universities (Rüegg 1993).

Analyzing the internal politics of German universities, Schimank describes “factual non-aggression pacts” (Schimank 2001: 233) which often prevent decisions that could potentially harm a colleague. Those, he argues, oftentimes prevent decisions which could potentially harm a “colleague”. A norm of collegiality is perceived among the professors on one hand and on the other rational choices among the professors; this combined leads to no decision in case of doubt. A majority vote would result in conflict among the professors and inhibit the chance of a professor being overruled one day, becoming the victim of a majority vote himself.

By this brief overview we can conclude that collegiality has been an issue throughout the last decades, highlighting the specifics as well as the necessity of collegiality for example for the purpose of legitimizing the process of decision-making. However, in universities collegiality is only characterizing the relationship between the professors and does, in general, not encompass other university members. Despite the democratization efforts during the 1970s in Germany that led to the inclusion of the large ‘status groups’ into the decision-making bodies, students, academic faculty, and technical and administrative employees are considered subordinate and therefore are not included in the inner circle of significant decision-makers. Furthermore, collegiality serves to restrict hierarchy within the ‘status group’ of the professors in two ways: Firstly, it limits the scope of action both of the professors and the university president due to his own membership in this status-group. Secondly, under the umbrella of collegiality, potentially controversial issues are taken out of the committees into working-groups in order to find a consensus thereby circumventing the committees of academic self-administration and the members of other status groups therein. Collegiality is viewed as negotiating among equals and therefore, the ones who are members of the university but no members of the professors are excluded. The university president, though, as a fellow professor is expected to consult with status equals during decision-making processes. Thus, collegiality as a mode of governance entrenches equality in a double fashion: inclusively, in that it binds university presidents to negotiating within their own status group; and exclusively, in that it largely restricts the procedure of deliberation and decision-making to the ‘proper’ members of the “republic of scholars”, i.e. the professorship.

2.1.4 German Universities: Changes in Formal Regulations, the Organization, Shared Governance, and Collegiality

The aforementioned concepts of shared governance and collegiality shall now be highlighted in the German context. Since it is the aim of this study to find out about the actual practices of university leadership I will first focus on formal, legislative changes before turning to collegiality in universities. The former includes shared governance as the dominant path for seeking legitimacy which was intended to be weakened in favor of a formal strengthening of the universities top-level management. The latter refers to universities as scientific institutions, where consensus and collegiality are part of the socialization of the actors, the scientists.

The reforms in German higher education legislation have resulted in major changes in the governance of universities. These changes have affected not only the relationship between higher education institutions and external stakeholders like the federal ministries of science, but also the composition of internal governance mechanisms, especially shared governance. Major goals of those reforms have been streamlining decision-making within universities, providing greater power and authority to central executives, and an altered role of academic senates and board of trustees (de Boer 2003: 91). In Germany especially the academic senate has lost many decision-making rights in the wake of these reforms while university presidents have been strengthened and boards of trustees introduced (Hüther 2010). Consequently, a shift has occurred from a “dual power structure” (Schimank 2005; Schimank/Lange 2009), where legally strong federal states regulated universities on the one hand and committees of academic self-governance decided upon intra-organizational issues on the other, towards organizations with “actorhood” and organizational autonomy (Meier 2009). Some authors have even observed a “managerial revolution”, indicated by rising demands of efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Maasen/Weingart 2006: 20).

The legislative reforms have aimed at granting German universities more ‘autonomy’ by turning them into stakeholder universities. Manifold reasons made it appear necessary for policy makers to pursue this idea. Most of the reasons put forward are connected to the notion of “efficiency”. Among those the decision-making processes that were perceived as “too slow, cumbersome and obstructive” (Leach 2008: 16) for achieving swift reforms and responding to changes in the external environment of universities in a timely fashion. “Efficiency” here aims at lowering the influence of the committees of academic self-administration to ensure and promote faster decision-making processes. Strengthening the university president’s (and the dean’s) rights and thereby circumventing the self-governance committees’ approval have been meant to facilitate this by allowing for more hierarchical top-down decision-making processes by the leadership level of universities. First and foremost by the university presidents which was not possible in

the former setting of various committees on many levels of the university starting in the departments and ending in the academic senate that had to be heard and consulted and convinced for major changes whether they were initiated from the top or from the bottom (de Boer 2003; Reponen 1999).

The Effects of the Legislative Reforms on the Positions of University Presidents, Academic Senates, Ministry, and Board of Trustees

The wave of higher education legislation reforms in Germany during the last decades brought about major changes in the governance of universities. These have affected the main stakeholders, both 'old' and 'new', of university governance quite differently. Therefore, the following sections will be dedicated to a brief assessment of their recent positional changes in order to outline the institutional context of my interviews and their analysis.

The Boards of Trustees and the Federal State Ministries of Science

Including external stakeholders into the governance of universities is a rather new development in German higher education. They were not a regular part of university leadership until the 1998 higher education legislation reform which allowed higher education institutions to establish new ways of organizing that were not possible before because of national statutory provisions (Lange 2009: 349). However, legally binding and specified responsibilities for the boards of trustees were not established because "the involvement and extent of advises and co-decisions by boards of trustees has to be specified by the higher education institutions themselves" (HRK 2000: 10; own translation). This allows for great heterogeneity regarding not only the composition (internal or external members) but also concerning their rights (only in a consultative role or with the right of co-determination) and their duties (Lange 2009: pp 352). Some boards of trustees are given just an advisory status; others elect the university president, vote on the university constitution and get involved in organizational development. In all cases the competencies of the boards are composed of tasks that used to be assigned to the federal state ministries of science on the one hand and the academic senates on the other (Meyer-Guckel/Winde/Ziegele 2010; Hütther 2010; Bogumil et al. 2007).

New Public Management (NPM) is deemed to be a main driving force behind the rise of boards of trustees in German higher education institutions and, more generally, a trend towards more independence from the ministerial bureaucracy by strengthening the leadership level of universities (Lanzendorf/Pasternack 2008: 52). Usually four main goals have been linked to the introductions of boards of trustees: firstly, bridging the perceived public relations gap between higher education and the general public; secondly increasing universities' independence from

the state; thirdly, gaining input from ‘outside the box’ in order to sharpen the respective university’s profile; and finally, strengthening their strategic planning and decision-making competencies (Bogumil et al. 2007: 11). There was hope that higher education institutions would benefit from the management expertise of representatives from the private sector as members of their boards.

As public institutions universities have been subject to interference from the federal states in Germany for many years. Because of the federal governance structure in Germany the “Länder”, the federal states, were and are responsible for the higher education institutions within their jurisdiction with regards to legislation and they provide a large proportion of their monetary budgets. Universities are educational organizations and as such their cause is to provide and produce scientific knowledge. They provide students with the skills necessary to enter different (academic) professions and they equip them with the methods necessary to contribute to scientific knowledge. It is in the public interest that they function as educational organizations and achieve the goals connected to that. Furthermore, they have never been able to provide for themselves financially. As both the guarantors of the public interest in a functional higher education system and its main provider of funding the federal state ministries of science have had tremendous influence on university governance.

Lately, however some of the federal state responsibilities have been delegated to external organizations, such as accreditation agencies for the quality assurance of study programs, to boards of trustees, and to university presidents and deans. The federal state ministries are now focusing on negotiating bilateral agreements on targets and performance with the universities, especially with regards to the budgets (Lanzendorf/Pasternack 2008: 52).

The Academic Senates

The academic senate is the major internal academic self-governance body of German universities. The members of German academic senates are elected by the members of the various so called status-groups those are: the students, the employees in administration and technical assistance, the academic faculty, and the professors. The academic senate used to decide on most structural, financial and human-resources matters with university-wide significance. However, resulting from the wave of reforms in higher education legislation that occurred in Germany most dramatically during the late 1990s the senate’s responsibilities have been cut back. Today, collegial decision-making bodies are “rather advisory than vested with decision-making powers” (de Boer 2003: 91). Only matters that are directly linked to research and teaching at their university are left for them to decide on. Most of their former competencies have been gradually shifted to decentralized levels of

decision-making, especially to the boards of trustees and the deans (Hüther 2010; Meyer-Guckel/Winde/Ziegele 2010).

The academic senates gained little from the legislative reforms. Maybe the only thing they did gain, if it can be termed as that at all, is that the academic senates in most German federal states can vote the university president out of office – this was not possible until the late 1990s. Furthermore, due to these reforms participation in the committees of academic self-administration seems to have lost attraction since the committees are perceived as less meaningful by the members of the universities (e.g. Breitbach 2009). Nevertheless, committees of academic self-administration remain a strong counterpart to the presidency that can still disturb and possibly prevent top-down decision making. The members of, for instance, the academic senate are legitimized by the university members by election in the respective university and therefore they can pressure the university president at least in a moral or normative sense while the electorate of the university presidents are various representatives (depending on the federal state) (Hüther 2010; Bieletzki 2012).

The University Presidents

For explaining the legislative changes around the office of university president in Germany I have to provide a little more detail to convey the wider context. Clark (1983) described German universities as “a combination of political regulation by the state and professional self-control by an ‘academic oligarchy’” (Clark 1983: 140). Schimank (2005) picked up this thought by ascribing German universities a “dual nature” (Schimank 2005: 363) of being both public institutions and autonomous corporations. For the last two hundred years universities’ institutional autonomy has been low because of manifold state regulations (Schimank 2005). The university’s professors’ individual autonomy, though, has been relatively high and they are still described as autonomously acting units. In effect this resulted in a narrow margin for top-down leadership by the presidents who were left with the role of being the “first among equals” because strong forms of top-down leadership were prevented by the former governance arrangement (Meier/Schimank 2010: 213). University presidents used small incentives to support bottom-up activities (Meier/Schimank 2010: 214).

‘Autonomy’ has become the overarching slogan of a debate that is mostly concerned with enlarging competencies of control and action on the level of higher education institutions at the expense of detailed state regulations (Röbken 2006; Bleiklie 2004). Gaining this kind of autonomy has resulted in new challenges for the overall administration of universities and especially for the office of the university president (Müller-Böling/Kühler 1998; Kleimann 2011).

Until just a few decades ago the office of university president used to rotate among the university's professors and their time in office was rather short. The rotation system was justified as a means to avoid personal accumulation of power (Pellert 1999: 171). Usually a term lasted just a few years and the president's rights and duties were more or less limited to representative tasks. Nevertheless, the office was considered prestigious. Usually professors from the same university got elected before retirement and therefore until recently, the office of university president has not been considered to be an alternative career choice to the academic career at universities. Changing this tradition and professionalizing the leadership of universities in Germany has been described as inevitable since not only the quantity of work has increased but also the complexity of the issues that need to be tackled (Ziegele/Nickel 2006).

Critics of professionalization of university leadership argue that the demands of professionalization lead to a "colonization" of research and teaching by economic and administrative imperatives (e.g. Stock/Wernet 2005). Furthermore it is argued that contemporary professionalization means nothing less than centralizing power at the upper echelons of universities and this contradicts the long tradition of academic self-government. Some even assert to be confronted with "presidential feudalism" which will result in excessive bureaucracy and, consequently, lead to "the self-destruction of the German university system" (Scholz/Stein 2015: 7; own translation).

So, what is it that stirs up those debates, what has actually happened legally to strengthen the office of university president in Germany? I want to emphasize two issues: the selection process and the terms in office of university presidents.

The selection process for the position of university president in Germany has severely changed due to the legislative reforms in the 1990s. Until 1998 German university presidents were selected and elected by the academic senate or the 'Konzil', depending on the federal state's legislation, for a fixed and rather short amount of time of just a few years and then appointed by the federal state's ministry of science (HRG 1987, §61). So, while it used to be the constituencies of the respective university alone who picked the highest representative of the university, with a merely formal role for the federal state's ministry of science, it is now a process that involves external stakeholders. Today there is a large variety of procedures for selecting and electing a university president, depending on the federal state. But in general one can sum up that the federal state ministries of science are involved by having a seat in the university's board of trustees in some federal states. The board of trustees has a vote at some time at the end of the procedure, where exactly depends on the federal state's higher education legislation. The academic senates are still involved, however, with far less influence since the boards are usually included in decision-making on a new university president in Germany

today (Hüther 2010). While finding and electing a university president was an internal affair and a matter of academic self-administration it is now a process with lots of variations depending on the federal state but it is always involving external stakeholders (boards or the federal state ministries) in Germany.

Secondly, university presidents in Germany now hold longer terms in office: these are now at least five years. But again, they differ according to the respective federal state's legislation (Hüther 2010). Longer terms in office were meant to strengthen the university president's position by providing them with more time to implement changes. It is suggested that short terms in office result in an unwillingness for greater organizational change initiated by university presidents.

"University leaders who expect to have only a short term in office have both less incentives and fewer opportunities to bring about more fundamental change" (Röbken 2007: 150).

Though, as Röbken (2007) has shown, presidential tenure declined throughout the last two decades in Germany.

Policy makers, in particular, demanded longer terms in office and eventually paved the way for legal reforms leading not only to longer terms in office, but also to a strengthened university president with regards to further rights and competencies. University presidents in Germany can now set the binding agenda without a veto position by the academic senates and, among other things, they are provided with more far reaching competencies regarding personnel decisions (Hüther 2010).

The scope of hierarchical decision-making, however, is limited for university presidents by the academic senates who can vote university presidents out of office now. Depending on the federal state a complementary vote by the board of trustees may be required. Recall from office was not warranted by federal state legislations before because independence of the leader and continuity of leadership were prioritized (Hüther 2010: 275). Recall regulations were introduced successively in all of the federal states higher education legislation, though very heterogeneously (Hüther 2010: 287).

The overall aim of the formal strengthening of the office of university president was to replace the model of collegial leadership with a more hierarchical, managerial model (Hüther 2010) where "academic recognition is supplanted with management skills" (Musselin 2007: 68). As mentioned above, university presidents are confronted with external as well as internal demands. Therefore, they were granted more rights and competencies in exchange for less detailed state regulations. However, leading a university is still unavoidably intertwined with the

committees of academic self-administration and for this reason German university presidents are said to still have hardly any scope for action.

This far we have learned that there are competing concepts about how decisions should be made in universities. A common theme, however, is the importance of shared governance and collegiality. Considering the formal regulations a strengthening of hierarchy can be witnessed but shared governance as well as collegiality remain important governance components. Now we can wonder: How do German university presidents lead universities? With collegiality or with hierarchy?

2.2 Research on University Presidents

This sub-chapter shall give an overview of the relevant literature regarding my research subjects: the university presidents. Since there are only a few publications about university presidents in Germany all the aspects under consideration will be considered by international, mostly American contributions because research on university presidents is a comparatively well-established field within higher education research in the United States and Canada. In particular, the works of Birnbaum (1988; 1989a,b; 2004), Pfeffer/Salancik (1980) and Cohen and March (1974; 1986) are relevant and have inspired researchers to conduct further studies. The vast amount of literature can be grouped into three sections.

(1) Firstly, reports and books of usually American university and college presidents' themselves. As interesting as they might be they do not provide us with much more than story-telling and will not be considered here.

(2) Secondly, publications by policy makers concerned with issues such as costs and benefits and suggestions on how good leadership works. Those provide us with insights on the ideals that consulting agencies and stakeholders from the universities' environment have.

(3) Thirdly, publications from American higher education research. As a well-established field of research within the social sciences they provide us with research-based results on the leadership of American higher education research institutions. These are the most helpful and relevant findings for my study and guide this section regarding the state of the art of research on leadership in higher education institutions.

Higher Education Leadership Theories

The most cited theoretical findings on the governance and leadership of universities were generated by the work of Robert Birnbaum during the 1980s and 1990s in the United States. Unfortunately, not much follow-up research has been done since then on which I could draw. Problems regarding the development of a suit-

able theory for higher education leadership are for example, the unclear expectations of the presidential role (Kerr 1963; Birnbaum 1990). Moreover, university presidents are constrained by factors that are difficult to alter such as the flow of resources (Cohen/March 1974). Furthermore, the performance of higher education institutions seems to be only modestly affected, if at all, by changes in leadership (Birnbaum 1988). On the other hand, management theory suggests that top managers have substantial influence on organizational outcomes and that both, strategy and effectiveness, can partly be predicted by background characteristics (e.g. Hambrick/Mason 1984).

One of the early contributions of Birnbaum (1989) is concerned with the implicit leadership theories held by university presidents in the United States. Those are the subjective leadership models that university presidents hold and which effect "how presidents interpret their roles and find meaning in the events they encounter" (Birnbaum 1989a: 125). His study reveals that most university presidents in his sample (n=32) define leadership as "a one-way process whose function was to get others to comply with or conform to the leader's directives" (Birnbaum 1989a: 129) resulting in the following definition of leadership: "college and university presidents in general define leadership as a process of influence directed towards the achievement of goals" (Birnbaum 1989a: 130). The university presidents in his sample also stress the necessity of "mutual exchange processes" (Birnbaum 1989a: 129), drawing on social exchange theory (Blau 1964) emphasize the "two-way mutual influence and reciprocal relationships between leaders who provide needed services to a group in exchange for the group's approval and compliance with the leader's demands" (Birnbaum 1989a: 128).

Other than management theorists before, Pfeffer argues, that the impact of leaders on organizational outcomes are small and leaders primarily "serve as symbols for representing personal causation of events" (Pfeffer 1977: 104). This argument rests on three pillars: the homogeneity of leaders, the constraints on leader behavior, and the limited scope of leadership.

Homogeneity of leaders results from the selection process. There is a "tendency for persons to like those they perceive as similar" (Pfeffer 1977: 106) in addition to an "internal system of influence" (Pfeffer 1977) like political influence that is exercised upon those participating in the selection process. Furthermore, each organization has a certain image and persons also select themselves into organizations and roles based on their personal preferences. The constraints on the leaders' behavior results from the social system he is embedded in. For instance, leaders usually have less unilateral control of resources, policies, and processes than might be expected; some decisions require the approval of other committees; external factors like the demands of external stakeholders do also exercise a limiting effect on the scope of action for leaders (Pfeffer 1977). The homogeneity of

leaders rests on upon his finding, that those who obtain leadership positions are pre-selected. Thereby “only certain, limited styles of behavior” (Pfeffer 1977: 106) are chosen. The constraints of leader behavior are resulting, furthermore, from the constraining effects of the office itself. The limited scope of leadership is due to the limitation of the variables that leaders themselves can affect to enhance organizational performance.

Clark’s (1983) description of the continental European higher education system stresses a special distribution of authority. A characteristic was that both, the academics and the state bureaucracy held substantial powers and therefore describes the leaders as rather weak authorities.

“[The] top level of the university was regarded as the ‘middlemen’ relaying information both top down and bottom up. Thus, in the traditional type continental structure, substantial powers were vested at the bottom, in the academic guild, and at the top of the system, that is, the ministerial bureaucracy” (Clark 1983: 127).

For the German context Kleimann describes the contemporary “model of presidential leadership” as “hybrid”, i.e. neither purely collegial nor hierarchical. Moreover, the roles of university presidents are said to be unclear and ambiguous which results in the need for university presidents to change roles, depending on the situation they are facing (Kleimann 2016: 841). Flink and Simon (2015) identify three types of university presidents. The first one is traditionalist who holds on to the principle of collegiality and the concept of independent professors. The second type intervenes only unless it will not cause any distortions with the academic faculty. The third type enjoys his strengthened role and is not afraid of possibly arising conflicts with the professors by acting as a manager (Flink/Simon 2015:115).

Taking a glance at the catchphrases used by researchers on presidential leadership we can witness historic trends. In the early twentieth century they were simply described as “leader” or “officeholder” (Hutchins 1914). In the 1960s with the advent of the cold war they were referred to as “colleague”, “administrator”, “spokesman” (Walberg 1962) and as “caretakers” (Dodds 1962). The 1980s, times of political unrest, were hallmarked by descriptions of university presidents as “statesman-politicians” and “peacekeepers” (Baldrige 1986), as “captain” and “crisis manager” (Scott 1983), as “manager-politician” (McCorkle 1982) and as “entrepreneur” and “manager” (Peck 1983). In the 1990s higher education research gains a foothold in Germany and Pellert (1999) offers a typology ranging from “manager”, to “rationalist”, to “problem solver”, to “modernizer”. In general, however, the debate on presidential leadership in Germany is led along the lines of “rector”, meaning the traditional model of the president being *primus inter*

pares, and “president”, highlighting the managerial demands towards the leadership of universities. To sum up: in historical perspective the depictions of university presidents’ alternate between an economic discourse and a discourse of power. I want to stress what binds these two divergent discourses together: collegiality.

For the European context Bleiklie (2004) highlights the institutional values of leadership and how these relate to the organizational forms of universities. He defines leadership as being “about the definition of institutional mission and role, the institutional embodiment of purpose, the defense of institutional integrity, and the ordering of internal conflict” (Bleiklie 2004: 8; Selznick 1984). Hence, institutional leadership is important to maintain integrity, i.e. the “persistence of an organization's distinctive values, competence, and role” (Bleiklie 2004: 8).

As long as “institutions are made up and run by collegial peer groups [they] may have a comparatively easy job in the particular sense that goals and values are internalized by the members and often taken for granted” (Bleiklie 2004: 9). In such a situation the university president is “*primus inter pares*” and can “count on the support of the members of the organization in promoting institutional values. [...] In such a situation leadership is not just easy it is hardly needed” (Bleiklie 2004: 10).

However, to the democratization that occurred during the 1970s and the more recent introduction of external stakeholders in boards of trustees, leadership has become more difficult to perform since it is not only the “elites” anymore that organize and decide upon the university's affairs. Bleiklie states that the university's institutional values with regard to leadership are strong that new ideals are layered on top of existing ones in a process of sedimentation (Bleiklie 1998) instead of being replaced.

Strategy in Leadership

The implementation of reforms by university presidents in Germany is one of the issues my study is focusing on. Therefore, it is necessary to take a look at the most interesting findings on strategy in higher education leadership. The use of strategies by university presidents is an important issues that American higher education leadership research is concerned with. However, there is no consensus on the definition of ‘strategy’ in leadership literature this far. Two reasons are constantly repeated for this deficiency: firstly, strategy is multidimensional and secondly, situational and thereby subject to variation by the organizational context (Hambrick/Mason 1984; Chaffee 1985; Neumann 1989).

Nevertheless, of course, some basic premises on strategy can be found in the literature on leadership of higher education institutions. One is that organizational leaders use strategy to cope with changing environments which, in the end, affects the overall welfare of the organization (Hambrick 1980; Biggadike 1981; Lenz

1980a). There is also agreement that the study of strategy in leadership action requires looking at the processes of decision-making, i.e. actions that should be (or were) taken, their implementation as well as the content and intention of the chosen strategy. However, it has been noted that “intended, emergent and realized strategies may differ from one another” (Chaffee 1985: 89). Beyond those rather general findings there is little agreement because of the ‘multidimensional’ and ‘situational’ nature of strategy that is put forward.

Higher education researchers often refer to the “three models of strategy” identified by Chaffee (1985) that she applied specifically to higher education institutions. Resulting from a rich analysis of publications on strategy in leadership she proposes the following categorization: linear strategy, adaptive strategy and interpretative strategy.

The linear strategy focuses on planning and assumes rational decision-making in order to achieve results. The environment is given less attention than in the other two strategies. The basic assumptions of the linear strategy can be summarized as follows: (a) The linear strategist assumes a tightly coupled organization where decisions made at the top can be implemented in the overall organization. (b) The environment does not matter or it is predictable. (c) Achieving organizational goals is the most important outcome of strategy. (Chaffee 1985; Neumann 1989)

The adaptive strategy assesses organizations as well as their environmental conditions. When the environment changes so does the organization. Therefore the environment is carefully monitored for demands, opportunities as well as possible threats (Chaffee 1985; Neumann 1989). The primary aim of adaptive strategists is to secure the flow of resources (Pfeffer/Salancik 1978).

Finally, the interpretative strategy is centered on the organization’s leaders which “shape the attitudes of participants and potential participants towards the organization and its outputs” (Chaffee 1985: 94). The model assumes that reality is socially constructed (Berger/Luckmann 1966) and therefore leaders are primarily concerned with “shaping the values, symbols, and emotions influencing individual behaviors” (Neumann 1989: 141). This is achieved by explanations and clarifications of the leaders addressed at the diverse actors involved. Dealing with the environment instead of ignoring it (linear strategy) or aligning the organization with it (adaptive strategy) is of concern here.

Neumann (1989) tested the analysis of Chaffee empirically and applied it to presidential strategies in higher education institutions. She found that a majority of American university presidents use a linear strategy as an initial strategy for reform processes. However, when taking a closer look at “old” (in office for more than three years) and “new” (in office from one to three years) presidents, she found some differences. New presidents, according to her results, tend to use a

larger variety of strategies than the ones who have been in office for a longer period of time. These prefer the use of an interpretative strategy alone. She explains this by the increasing complexity of environments over time that requires more complex strategic approaches. The most stunning finding, however, is the absence of differences in strategy by type of higher education institution or type of institutional control that can be exercised (Neumann 1989: 146). This contradicts Baldrige et al. (1978) who have suggested that the form of leadership varies with the type of higher education institution.

Birnbaum (1989) has also studied the perceived strategies on the achievement of goals by American university presidents empirically. His analysis shows that American university presidents use two major methods to influence the achievement of goals in their universities. On the one hand in terms of a directive mode of influence: university presidents use “personal or positional power, or specific behaviors, to channel the activities of others to achieve desired ends” (Birnbaum 1989: 131). They describe themselves as the impelling force that moves people towards those goals. On the other hand Birnbaum identifies a supportive and facilitative way of goal achievement in which it is not the president who exercises his power and influence for pushing goals, here presidents encourage others and remove barriers to enable their success. While the first mode revolves around the power and potential of presidents to push towards goals the second mode focuses on their potential to encourage others to work towards their goals.

A perceived lack of information on “the beliefs, ideas, and expectations that underlie the different patterns of presidential behavior, how those ideas differ over time and place, or which seem to work particularly well and under what circumstances” (Neumann 1989: 139) led to a phase of intense research of presidential strategies in the United States from the 1970s until the early 1990s. Unfortunately, this academic debate has remained largely unmatched in German higher education research. In one of the few German studies university presidents were asked which strategies they use when implementing change. The majority of them claimed to use participative or at least semi-participative modes of governance and criticized authoritarian modes of leadership are viewed as improper (Püttmann 2013). However, this analysis fails to answer how the (semi-) participative mode of leadership is exercised and why it is done that way. Similarly, another quantitative study indicates German university presidents negotiate before making decisions but are also willing to push unpopular reform-goals against resistance (Müller et al. 2012).

Internationally, the academic debate on the leadership of universities is currently addressing more general issues like the difficulties of ruling over an academic community in New Public Management regimes (Braun et al. 2015; Paradeise et al. 2009), the general structural weakness of leadership in universities

(Julius et al. 1999), and the limited scope for unilateral action in university leadership is limited due to their dependence on support by the academic community (Bryman 2007; Corrigan 2013). As for the German context, the dynamics and strategies of leading a university as seen by those involved is lacking attention my study will address this research gap.

Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Publications on the leadership level of universities concerned with the room for maneuver or the scope of action can be grouped into two sections: transformational and transactional approaches (e.g. Röbbken 2006). While the first assume a proactive leadership role, the latter state that the scope of possible action and the influence of individual leaders are overestimated. This is a very elaborate field of research and I will only shed a short spotlight on this part of the general leadership debate.

Transformationalists (Fisher/Koch 1996; Selzer/Bass 1990; McDade/Lewis 1994) state that the individual leader is the major initiator of reform activities which aim to secure the survival of the organization. Moreover, it is the leader who is responsible for organizational change. Authors who apply transformational leadership ideals to universities suggest that “presidents can make a difference, and they are capable of transforming their institution” (Fisher/Koch 1996).

Transactionalists (Cohen/March 1986; Bensimon 1993; Birnbaum 1989 a) on the other hand, point to the limitations due to bureaucratic regulations and organizational specifics which can hardly be influenced by individual leaders. External factors of the organizational environment are said to limit the scope for action and significant decisions. Cohen and March can be regarded as transactionalists (Röbbken 2006) since they state:

“The presidency is an illusion. Important aspects of the role seem to disappear on close examinations. In particular, decision-making in the university seems to result extensively from a process that decouples problems and choices and makes the president’s role more commonly sporadic and symbolic than significant” (Cohen/March 1986: 2).

It follows that university leaders can be mediators at best due to the limited scope of influence (Pellert 1999; Baldrige 1976) and that university presidents react to expectations rather than actively shaping them (Röbbken 2006).

Both streams of thought shall be kept in mind for this study, since the actions of universities are restricted by both internal and external organizational limitations. Internal organizational limitations are, for example: size, composition of departments, and staff structure, which can be influenced only in the long range and

are thereby out of reach for individual university presidents. Moreover, higher education legislation and the participatory rights of the committees of academic self-administration the scope for action for university presidents. External restrictions are for example the universities' budget, which may not allow for ambitious reforms, and policies which can be subject to party politics much more than the needs university presidents see for their institutions.

However, as stated, the latest reforms in German higher education legislation start from the premise that strong and influential leaders in higher education institutions are willing to assume the responsibilities that were formerly assigned to the federal state ministries of science. Some authors assume a governance vacuum if university presidents are not able to fulfill those responsibilities. Since decision-making processes as well as any forms of action are only possible if there is a leader who is willing to accept the strengthened role.

2.3 Career Paths of University Presidents

While career research is a well established research field in the United States and Great Britain the continental European research landscape has not yet contributed on a major scale to the development of an own career research field (Mayrhofer/Schneidhofer 2009: 721). This research gap is evident in higher education career path research as well.

Moore et al. state that, unlike businesses, universities pursue a "policy of natural selection" (Moore et al. 1983: 501) for the identification of their future leaders. Diverse, supposedly increasing, qualifications are demanded of the presidential candidates; which ones exactly, however, is not even agreed upon within finding committees (Moore et al. 1983: 502). As for the United States, by the 1940's presidents needed prior experience in administrative functions like that of dean or vice-president because of the "practical and political work" that presidents have to master (Knode 1944). By the 1960's, due to financial constraints, there were more university presidents with managerial skills to be found (Socolow 1978).

While Germany is lacking studies on the career of university presidents, American higher education researchers offer plenty. The work of Cohen and March (1974) "Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President" is among the most popular studies on the issue in the field. They identified a hierarchical model that became known as the "normative presidential career path" and has since been followed up by numerous studies.

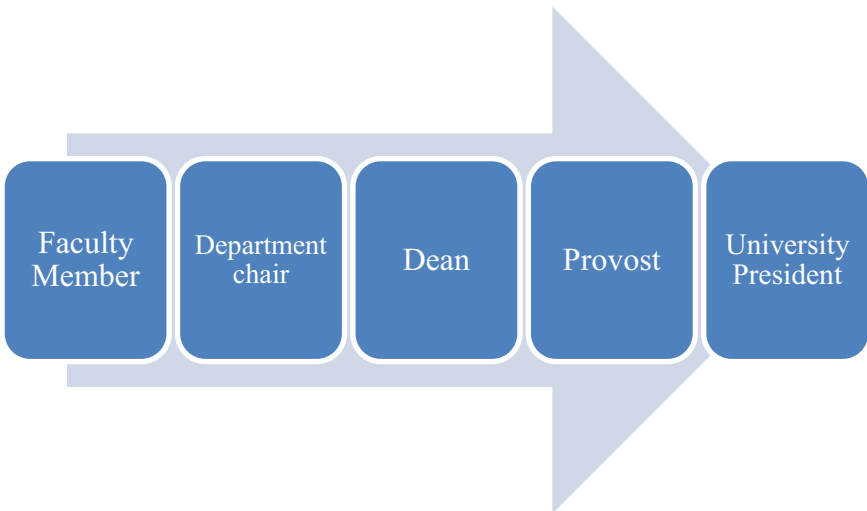
According to Cohen and March, American university presidents enter their career usually as faculty members. At some point they assume offices in administration and get promoted up the ladder through the offices of academic self-administration towards the presidency (Cohen/March 1974). Those findings have

been confirmed for the United States by numerous other authors (see for example Wessel/Keim 1994).

In follow-up studies Moore et al. (1983) and Salimbene (1982) identified fifteen variations of presidential career paths. Only few presidents are promoted from one position to the next one on the ladder consecutively usually they skip some rungs on the career ladder. Nevertheless, what all American university presidents have in common is prior experience as faculty members and in leading positions in academic self-administration (Moore et al. 1983: 513).

Wessel and Keim (1994) have examined presidential career paths in a survey based study. Their sample included responses from 270 presidents of private graduating higher education institutions in the United States. They identified two different career ladders. The first one is the one that Cohen and March had already described: Starting as a faculty member, the candidate moves up the ladder of administrative positions and ultimately becomes university president. The second career ladder is different in that the candidate has no or just minimal experience as a faculty member but extensive experience in administration. They move up the rungs of various administrative positions before progressing into presidency. However, the academic career path is the dominant one in the United States, accounting for 70% of the presidencies in Wessel and Keim's sample (Wessel/Keim 1994).

Figure 1. Normative presidential career path acc. to Cohen/March (1986)



Wessel and Keim also suggest that it is common to skip steps in both of the career ladder models: The direct promotion from one position to the next without leaving out a step is only represented by a minority of presidents (Wessel/Keim 1994: 222-223). They conclude that university presidents

“have to have academic work experience, usually as a faculty member. This experience as a faculty member may be perceived as necessary preparation for understanding the faculty and the academic mission of the institution” (Wessel/Keim 1994: 223).

Academic experience has to include “successful top-level management/leadership experience” (Wessel/Keim 1994: 224) be it inside the academe, as the ones representing the majority and following the academic career pattern, or inside administration, as the minority following the administrative career path.

A later study conducted by Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) aimed at identifying four different career paths they proposed: scholar, steward, spanner, and stranger. These are divided into two subcategories: traditional and nontraditional.

Traditional career paths comprise what they call the “Scholar-President” and the “Steward-President”. The Scholar-President has had “full-time higher education teaching experience and their previous two positions were in higher education” (Birnbaum/Umbach 2001: 206). The Scholar-President represents the “normative presidential career ladder” that Cohen and March (1974, 1986) had already discovered, i.e. a faculty appointment followed by successive administrative positions of increasing responsibility. The Steward-President has “never taught but their two prior positions were in higher education”. Steward-Presidents become university presidents after administrative careers in higher education institutions. The non-traditional category is represented by the spanner and the stranger: The Spanner-Presidents:

“appears to be boundary spanners who maintain significant commitments both to higher education and to other types of institutions or organizations. They have been outside the academy at some recent point in their career before assuming the presidency” (Birnbaum/Umbach 2001: 206).

The Stranger-Presidents, finally, are:

“presidents who have never taught and whose previous two positions were outside higher education. Strangers come directly to their presidential positions from business, the military, politics, or some other nonacademic position without previous experience in a college or university” (Birnbaum/Umbach 2001: 207).

Despite their well-elaborated categories Birnbaum and Umbach had to group 90% into the category of scholar president and therefore they pretty much confirmed Cohen and March's findings from 1974.

Recently several studies have been conducted on the recruitment of European university leadership staff. Goodall (2006) found that the world's top universities tend to recruit highly reputed scientist as their presidents and vice-presidents. However, my focus will not be to determine the research reputation of German university presidents and therefore such findings are noted but left aside for the further course of this study. Studying the recruitment of vice-chancellors at Swedish higher education institutions. Engwall (2014) observes more external recruitment and as well as a focus on managerial rather than academic credentials. Breakwell and Tytherleigh (2010) studied the recruitment of vice-chancellors in the United Kingdom and found that higher education institutions choose vice-chancellors that "match the aspirations and identity of the institution" (Breakwell/Tytherleigh 2010: 503). Moreover, they found an increase in the recruitment of women, social scientists, as well as a rising average age at which appointments are made (Breakwell/Tytherleigh 2007).

The underlying assumption that follows is that university presidents are highly qualified academics. An academic "who can comprehend the managerial functions of the institution rather than as an executive who must deal with the academic values present in the organization" (Moore et al. 1983: 503). It is therefore assumed that a managerial understanding is easier to achieve for an academic than achieving an understanding of academia as an outsider, as someone who has not climbed the academic career ladder and therefore lacks the specific socialization. It appears as if there is a logic of hierarchy that ultimately leads to the rank of university president.

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