

Hybridity through Transitions

Crisis and Resilience in Nordic Universities

Elias Pekkola, Luiz Alonso de Andrade,
Kerttu Kettunen and Stefan Lundborg (Eds.)



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Edited by

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Kerttu Kettunen and Stefan Lundborg



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Foreword

Mirko Noordegraaf

This rich book is a relevant book. Although it mainly seems to focus on crises in and around Nordic universities, the book covers more wide-ranging developments and debates, going beyond notions such as ‘crisis’, ‘Nordic’ and ‘universities.’ In fact, the book analyses a multitude of trends and transitions that (re)enact professional service work, also outside universities, and outside the Nordic countries.

It is relevant to study distinctive sites such as universities, not in the least because too many people think there is a ‘knowledge versus practice’ divide. They assume that universities generate knowledge on and for practice, which is situated ‘outside’ universities. This is misleading, not only because knowledge generation is societally distributed, as many societal actors generate knowledge and as universities are part of broader knowledge ecosystems. It is also misleading because universities are a practice themselves, which must be organized, steered, governed and managed. This means that using universities as empirical sites provides critical case material: we can study how we organize what is studied. At the same time, it is relevant to go beyond such sites and draw broader lessons, in this case on what hybridity means for organizing knowledge-intensive service delivery, in changing times.

Higher education institutions (HEI) such as universities contain knowledge-intensive work practices – most specifically education, research and impact – that are both highly professionalized as well as highly organized. The same goes for e.g., hospitals, the military, law courts, and the police. Although their work practices differ, these institutions all enable expert workers to treat clients and cases, to help or support (or punish) individuals and to serve society, to add societal value.

This is highly professionalized, in the sense that expert workers are part of professional fields that define, shape and protect professional work. They do so by selecting, schooling, socializing and supervising professional workers, by standardizing their work – both technically and ethically –, by spreading state-of-the-art knowledge, and by sanctioning workers if necessary. In a university, academics are trained, academic values are guarded, academic ways of working are established, and academic careers are well-defined. This is not only done to secure ‘high quality’ education and research, but also ‘high quality’ societal work, such as protecting independent advice and neutral judgement, in a democratic context.

At the same time, work practices are highly organized, as professional work happens within organizational surroundings, in ‘an organization’, with teams, units, managers, hierarchy, planning and control, reporting, budgeting, accountability and support staff. Such organizational features have been reinforced by the so-called ‘new public management’, but organizations such as universities, hospitals, the military, and the police have always been important to locate and facilitate professional service work. Organizing such services, irrespective of how they are organized, is necessary to secure stimulating work environments, teamwork, knowledge transfer, division of tasks, and specialization, as well as economies of scale, budgets, housing, facilities and equipment.

This means that organized institutions such as universities are intrinsically ‘hybrid’, one of the key terms in this book. They are professional or academic and organizational, at the same time; they are treating clients/cases and societal needs, at the same time; they are independent and (societally) related, at the same time. March and Olsen described universities as ‘organized anarchies’, on the one hand fragmented, horizontal, disorderly, and on the other hand organized, vertical, orderly. Later, such hybridity became clear and pressing hybridity. We started to see distinctive professional and organizational ‘logics’, which were even more enlarged and exposed when organizational logics became managerial, market, consumer and commercial logics, and when professional logics were linked to collaborative, societal and citizen logics. This book shows how this multitude of logics are enacted and come together, how they generate conflicts, and how professionals (academics), managers and support staff must cope, deal and navigate.

The book also shows that these conflicts are exacerbated by politics and formal policies that fuel divides between public, private and civil spheres, all present in and around service work. Universities have formally remained public – especially in countries such as the Nordic countries – but they have also become private ‘firms’, and they must formally be connected to civil spheres, including societal partners. This, in turn, affects universities’ strategies, identities and loyalties. It is impossible to define ‘the essence’ of a university, or any comparable service institution, as multiple outlooks, longings, viewpoints, and requirements come together. The hybridity of service work such as higher education is both constitutive and changing.

When it comes to change, the book shows that universities – and comparable service institutions – are affected by trends and transitions, or to be more precise, turbulent trends and transitions. In this book, authors show how universities are not only changing due to well-known trends such as economization and commercialization, but also due to digitalization and (populist) politicization, as well as transitions such as crises (e.g., Covid-19) and geopolitical

shifts (e.g., the war in Ukraine). Professional service delivery such as higher education is slowly, structurally and suddenly reconfigured. Financial and accountability pressures imply that measurement, transparency and results have gotten increasingly important. Digital technologies affect organizational processes, as well as professional work, as well as learning practices. Political skepticism, e.g., towards universities, and geopolitical contestation (especially with recent US developments). This is all rather confusing, contradictory and malleable.

All of this is relevant, as it enriches our views upon professional service work. First and foremost, this book implies that we must move beyond 'the organization'. There will be service organizations, such as 'the university', with explicit organizational surroundings and – nowadays – explicit governance and management regimes. But organizational surroundings are spread, layered and nested, and they are part of wider organizational fields, which are interwoven with societal and civil fields. Digitalization, for example, is not only coming 'from the outside'. It is also coming 'from within', through young students and scholars who are tech savvy, through meeting software, which means (transnational) interactive patterns are adapted, through generative AI, affecting how students and scholars wrote texts, through research projects, in which Big Tech is studied.

Secondly, the book shows we must move beyond 'purity'. Against the background of multiple logics, it is impossible to expect clarity when it comes to modes of working and managing work. Multiplicity, juxtapositions, paradoxes, tensions, conflicts and clashes are normal. Notions such as 'hybridity' capture this, and they capture both professional and organizational consequences. In this book, some authors e.g., explore whether hybridity enable universities to remain 'resilient'. Professional service work can never be 'tightly controlled'. At the most, professional and organizational actions are 'loosely coupled' (after Weick). Such loose couplings enable professional service organizations to remain true to themselves and adapt.

Thirdly, the book shows that we must move beyond 'stability'. Change is inevitable, well-organized professional work is continuously reconfigured. This is not only happening because 'external' demands at 'macro' or 'meso' levels are forcing universities to change. Academic work and academics are changing, as digital, political, economic and civil realities are changing, at 'street levels'. This is not only happening slowly but might also happen suddenly, as indicated. Turbulence, full of surprises, shifts and sentiments, can abruptly alter professional work. In one of the chapters (11), the authors speak about 'hybridity overload', when it comes to leading academic work. This is important, as academic work and managing academic work might be highly

demanding, calling for new skills and action repertoires, for academics, support staff and managers.

To conclude, a rich book like this draws conclusions, but can never be conclusive. It provides answers to pressing questions, and shows what is going on, what we can expect and how we can act. But it cannot give 'the answer', nor can it grasp 'the essence' of what is going on and what 'must' be done. To get a grip on professional service work, we must loosen our grip. Enjoy reading.

Professor of public management, head of department (and former vice dean for societal impact), Utrecht University School of Governance (USG), The Netherlands.

May 2025

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PART 1

Hybridity in Nordic Higher Education



Hybridity in Higher Education as Resilience to Crises, Issues and Challenges

Elias Pekkola, Jan-Erik Johanson, Luiz Alonso de Andrade, Stefan Lundborg, Kerttu Kettunen and Minni Virtanen

Abstract

Since the 1990s, Nordic higher education (HE) has undergone significant reforms, integrating market-based elements with traditional academic values. This hybridisation was further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated digitalisation and remote work. The chapter discusses how these changes led to a blending of physical and digital services, creating a resilient framework for HE institutions (HEIs). The hybridisation process has been crucial in enabling HEIs to adapt to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic challenges, and digitalisation. The chapter highlights the importance of resilience, defined as the ability to withstand and adapt to adverse conditions, in maintaining the core functions of HEIs. Overall, the chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of how hybridity and resilience mechanisms have shaped and will continue to shape the landscape of Nordic HE.

Keywords

challenges – crises – higher education – hybridity – Nordic – resilience

1 Introduction

Since the early 1990s, Nordic higher education (HE) has been reshaped by government-led reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM). These initiatives introduced market-oriented reforms into the sector by streamlining the governance and operations of HE institutions (HEIs), emphasising efficiency, clearly defined roles, and enhanced accountability – often at the expense of traditional collegial governance and professional autonomy. The consequence, however, was a gradual hybridisation of traditional and market-oriented features within HEIs. This blending has permeated various dimensions of

university life – including organisational structures, research agendas, and the provision of HE more broadly. Furthermore, hybridity has become a defining characteristic not only of long-established universities but also of emerging forms of HE infrastructure.

In 2020, university sector was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The abrupt shift to remote work, accelerated digitalisation, and the disruption of international travel introduced new operational arrangements within Nordic HEIs. These changes built upon ongoing transformation processes driven by technological advancement and globalisation. The interaction between these new arrangements and the ongoing infusion of new values and logics in HE further deepened and broadened the process of hybridisation to encompass the blending of physical and digital services and structures. These intertwined hybridisation processes, shaped by the Nordic model of HE – characterised by a commitment to egalitarianism, the view of higher education as a universal welfare right and a driver of societal and economic progress, substantial public funding, and strong state–university relations – have become central to the resilience mechanisms of HEIs in the Nordic region.

Although popular in academic and policy communities, hybridity is still a debated concept (Pekkola et al., 2021). In the context of governing organisations and societies, hybridity (a concept that has its origin in biology) is defined as the “impure existence in between pure types” of governance logics (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017). More specifically, in public policy and organisational research, hybridity refers to the coexistence of different sets of institutional drivers within the same unit of analysis. Hence, it encompasses a spectrum of blending arrays between contradictory institutional logics and values, across different analysis layers (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017). Hybridity thus asks for analyses in multiple levels such as: professional work, organisation, institutional logics, politics and public policies as well as missions of universities. Often these levels are nested or interrelated, giving rise to tensions and dilemmas which cannot be adequately addressed without systematic and critical scrutiny (Pekkola et al., 2021).

Despite multi-level hybridity has become increasingly entrenched – especially in the Nordic HEI context – limited attention has been paid to hybridity as a driver of organisational resilience. Yet universities are among of the oldest and most enduring institutions in Western societies, perhaps precisely because of their ability to adapt to changes, survive crises, and cultivate institutional resilience. In particular, there is a lack of systematic exploration into how hybrid arrangements, whether positively or negatively, emerge and take shape through the everyday activities of HEIs and have impact on (a) the primary tasks of teaching, research, and societal engagement/innovation, (b) the

structural (administrative, regulatory, and leadership) arrangements supporting these tasks, and c) the underlying norms, values, and identities of academic communities across disciplines. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing how HEIs navigate and adapt to changing external environments.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, we discuss the recent crises and their role in development of HE. After that we discuss hybridity as a resilience mechanism for the changes caused by external triggers. Finally, we outline the content of the book organised into three sections: (1) a conceptual overview of hybridity in HE, (2) hybridity as a response to crises such as COVID-19 pandemic; and (3) hybridity as a response to neoliberal policies in HE.

2 Higher Education in Crises?

Hybridisation is inherently a process of change, which in turn comes in many forms: it can be limited or comprehensive, planned or emergent, sudden or continuous (Dee et al., 2023). According to Tight (2024), HE scholars and practitioners often frame situations involving change as crises whenever possible. Consequently, HE is perceived as being in a state of constant crisis, meaning it faces perpetual environmental challenges while still maintaining its core functions and activities.

Crisis, however, represents a particular form of change, or at least the potential for change, that poses a threat to existing goals or values (Milburn et al., 1983). This implies that both organisations and societies must actively respond to such crises. Typically, discussion around crises revolves around the direction and extent to which the world and the organisations around us will transform. However, as Marmolejo and Groccia (2022) note in the context of HE, there is often a prevailing assumption that once a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, operations and practices will revert to their previous state of normalcy.

Consequently, not all disruptions in HE meet the etymological definition of a “crisis,” derived from the Greek *krisis*, signifying a decisive turning point in matters of life and death (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2021). Tight (2024) argues that, in many cases, the term “crisis” should be replaced with “issues” or “challenges” to more accurately reflect the realities of the academic environment. Nevertheless, he identifies seven overarching attributes of crises in the literature. First, the most evident recent crisis in the literature is (i) the COVID-19 pandemic. Second and third, there are two persistent streams of crisis literature: the impacts of (ii) environmental and (iii) economic crises on HE. These include a body of literature addressing (iv) student mental health crises,

as well as studies on (v) the academic profession, and (vi) academic values and institutional structures. Additionally, there is literature on the crises of (vii) certain disciplines, such as the humanities, facing financial pressures due to increasingly neoliberal ethos of contemporary HE policies and discourse.

The market-emulating reforms beginning in the 1980s represent one of the topics that have affected the provision of public services, including HE. The fundamental change, in contrast to previous government reforms, was that the position of public administration was politicised, and the government apparatus itself became a target for policy reform (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Austerity measures together with marketisation, privatisation, and contracting out have – where implemented – altered the role of government in service provision to backseat control rather than front seat driving, blurring previously established links between production, governance and accountability (Pierre & Painter, 2010). The introduction of a managerial approach, performance measurement, and the positioning of service users as clients rather than citizens have in many places swept throughout public service provision, altering the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among public servants (Frey et al., 2013). Universities have not evaded the influence of these reforms, and in many cases, the university community has been highly critical of these developments (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Marginson, 2013).

Because of the abovementioned changes, many former government entities have evolved into hybrid organisations: While they continue to rely on public funding and remain subject to government control and oversight, they no longer operate as traditional public agencies. In these cases, the dependency on public funding and continuous government control mean that the service providers have not transitioned into fully independent, private entities either. In other cases, the public status has been maintained but complemented by the creation of market-like structures characterised by competition (Kettunen et al., 2022). Being situated between public and private implies that universities, among other organisations attracting public interest, orbit the government's gravitational field, being inextricably tied to its workings and interests regardless of the practicalities of each particular system – but interact with the competing and merging logics in new, challenging ways (Adams & Balfour, 2010).

As this overview illustrates, the two predominant challenges universities have faced in recent decades are the COVID-19 pandemic and shifts in the politico-economic landscape. While the pandemic posed an immediate threat to operations, it has also given rise to a series of post-pandemic challenges that have reshaped the HE landscape. The political and economic shifts, however, represent a slower and more gradual structural and cultural transformation.

Discussions about COVID-19 are clearly interconnected with well-being and mental health-related issues experienced for instance students and academic staff (Tight, 2024). However, most studies focus on the pandemic exacerbated digitalisation of teaching, remote teaching, and remote learning, along with their impacts (Ramirez-Barrera et al., 2024).

3 Changing Higher Education Landscape and Resilience

Contemporary research has introduced resilience as a relevant concept to address HEIs' ability to respond and adapt to the above discussed crises and disruptions (Pinheiro et al., 2022). Resilience is a way of organisations responding to environmental changes and threats by adaptation of their internal design and structures (Frigotto et al., 2022). The term originated in the natural sciences where it was used to describe the elasticity of materials – their capacity to (a) bounce back, i.e., to return to its original state after an external shock, or (b) adapt to a new situation, while preserving its nature (Frigotto et al., 2022). Resilience stands in opposition to fragility, the susceptibility of a material to reach its breaking point when under stress. In a HE context, resilience refers to properties of academics, universities and HE systems which enable them to survive despite disruptions and adverse events. The notion of resilience is akin to using contingency theory to gauge organisations' capacity to adapt to external environmental demands and uncertainties (Pinheiro et al., 2022).

The environmental change that calls for resilience can be traced back to adversity triggers, which can be either expected or unexpected (Frigotto et al., 2022). In this volume, we address different types of adversities: First, COVID-19 represented an unexpected crisis for which HEIs were largely unprepared. In the immediate aftermath, universities were forced to pivot quickly, shifting from traditional in-person learning to remote and hybrid models with little time to plan or adapt. This disruption not only tested the resilience of institutions but also highlighted significant gaps in infrastructure, technology, and support systems. In the longer term, the aftermath of the pandemic has continued to pose challenges, as universities grapple with ongoing financial repercussions, shifts in student expectations, and the need for sustained digital transformation. The crisis also prompted a re-evaluation of the role of HE in society, as well as the long-term viability of certain educational practices and structures, leaving institutions to contend with both the immediate consequences and the enduring impacts of the pandemic.

Second, and in contrast, financial crises and related issues have been a long-standing concern, discussed extensively since the era of Reagan and

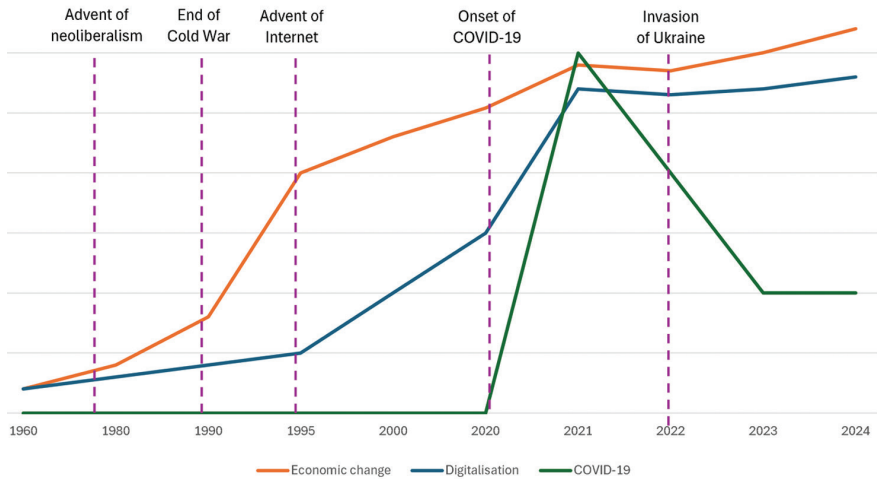


FIGURE 1.1 Change triggers and the extent of economic change, digitalisation, and COVID-19 effects over time

Thatcher and increasingly so after the 1980s with the introduction of austerity measures and New Public Management (NPM) reforms. Third, digitalisation occupies an intermediate position. While it has been a topic of discussion for decades, COVID-19 propelled it to a new level. Similarly, the rapid development of AI language models is further accelerating this transition.

As the cases presented in this book illustrate, the composite crises resulting from the interplay of multiple adversities have prompted HE systems' resilience not only to "bounce back" (i.e., absorptive resilience, see Frigotto et al., 2022) but also to develop enduring changes (i.e., adaptive or even transformative resilience, see Marmolejo & Groccia, 2022). Yet, the nature of the resilience response provided by a system as complex as HE – whether if it bounced back or "forward", and how – can only be witnessed over time. The three main changes and adversities (COVID-19, economic change, and digitalisation) discussed in this volume have fundamentally different timelines. Figure 1.1 depicts the extent of these changes and adversities as contrasted against the five HE environment impacting change triggers identified.

4 Post-Pandemic Resilience and Hybridity

Resilience mechanisms are expected to vary depending on the differing timelines and impacts of these changes. However, there is a clear and recent convergence of change triggers that not only build upon one another but also create new conditions for the continued functioning of HE. This sets the stage

for hybridisation processes on two fronts: hybridisation of previously separate streams of societal change influencing HEIs, and hybridisation of internal and external mechanisms of governance in managing the changing environment. The close interaction between these diverse forms of change is likely to prompt organisations to expand their resilience mechanisms. In theory, the diversity of structures and logics in hybrid organisations – such as the Nordic HEIs – are expected to equip them with a broader set of such mechanisms, making them resilient by design. This vision, however, overlooks the nuances of hybridity design, which depend not only on the ‘how’ but also on the underlying causes of organisational hybridity.

There are three main viewpoints on the position of hybrids in changing societies: (1) Hybridity as a consequence of government reform efforts, (2) Hybridity as an inherent part of society, and (3) hybridity as a medium for collective action. These perspectives correspond with the position of HEIs differently.

From the first viewpoint, hybridity would result from layered logics, traditions, and reforms forcing affected organisations to find new ways of combining an expanding array of governing mechanisms rooted in diverse and sometimes conflicting ideals (Sahlin, 2012). It could therefore be viewed as crossbreeding of different ways of thinking and acting into new perspectives and systems containing elements of both their origins as well as emergent properties resulting from the unique combination itself. Such crossbreeding could be intentional, but more likely results from the incremental introduction of new mechanisms rooted in different political hegemonies, without the simultaneous retirement of the mechanisms already in place. This positions universities as recipients – perhaps even victims – of public policies cascading down upon them over time, forcing adaptation to changing conditions, while positioning hybridity as either a side-effect of reform patterns or as a method of dealing with resulting challenges.

According to the second viewpoint, hybridity is an essential part of any society, both historical and contemporary. At the point of origin, the lack of division of labour between governing, trade, and community building enmeshed human activity in a primordial soup with rudimentary separation between institutions (see Stross, 1999). The building of states has been a long-term process in which markets, civil society, and government have evolved from personalised relationships and kinship to more organic types of interaction, such as stockholding in business enterprises, neutral and meritocratic bureaucracies in governments, and an active civil society organised around shared interests rather than locality or family ties (Rueschemeyer, 2005). From the hybridity point of view, the parts of society are still not totally separate entities, but rather interconnected structures with fluid and porous boundaries, far from being exclusive or insurmountable (Migdal, 2001). In this context, the

increasing specialisation of HE has significantly contributed to the difficulty of identifying activities that do not conform with distinct societal sectors. For instance, business schools may pay less attention to non-profits or state-owned enterprises, political science departments might overlook government actions that fall outside democratic decision-making, and social policy departments may frame civil society as a target of government policies rather than as an operative force in service provision.

From the third perspective, hybridity appears as a medium to tackle the grand challenges of modern societies, such as poverty, inequality, peace preservation, and climate change, as codified for instance in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More specifically, the hybridity lens offers possibilities to see options for concerted action that transcends the traditional boundaries of business, government, and civil society. Here, local solutions in combining enabling rule systems with the sustainable use of resources (Ostrom, 1990) can be used to overcome some of the collective action problems (Olson, 1971). HE plays an important role in equipping students with a broad understanding of how society functions. Thus, the rise of hybridity places demands on HEIs to adapt and integrate these perspectives into their curricula (Johanson et al., 2024).

The central question emerging from the above notions is whether hybridity fosters and promotes resilience or not. The answer is not straightforward. First, as the following chapters will demonstrate, whether universities adhere to their traditional models or adopt and adapt to new modes of operation, they remain inherently hybrid in their composition. Second, adoption of new hybrid forms offers neither a guaranteed path to success nor an inherent threat to the existence of HEIs.

Overall, traditional hybrid HE systems have demonstrated remarkable durability, representing one of the oldest and most enduring forms of organised human activity. However, while hybridity may foster resilience by enabling flexibility and innovation in governance, teaching, and research, it could also present some significant challenges. The coexistence of competing institutional logics, as demonstrated in the chapters in this volume, can create ambiguity in decision-making, role conflict among academic staff, and tensions between managerial and collegial governance structures. Hybrid work practices may also strain institutional coherence and complicate accountability, particularly when balancing professional autonomy with performance metrics.

As inherently complex organisations with multiple stakeholders and missions, universities must navigate these tensions carefully. This volume views hybridity at institutional, organisational, and individual levels as a key contributor to organisational resilience and long-term sustainability. However, in an

era of increasing marketisation and managerialism (see e.g., Alajoutsijärvi et al., 2024) – where universities are expected to sharpen their strategic focus and compete for public funding, external grants, and student enrolment – hybridity may also pose risks. If perceived as a lack of strategic clarity, it can undermine institutional competitiveness and weaken the university's ability to position itself effectively in the performance-driven, highly competitive contemporary HE landscape, as discussed also by Lundborg and Geschwind in Chapter 5. Furthermore, even though hybrid arrangements can enhance institutional resilience by fostering adaptability and innovation, Pöysä-Tarhonen suggests in Chapter 3 that hybrid educational spaces may also introduce complex interdependencies. These interdependencies can blur traditional boundaries within HEIs and, if not carefully managed, compromise academic autonomy. The core risk here lies in the potential erosion of academic integrity, as institutions navigate the tension between external demands and internal values in increasingly hybridised environments.

5 Book Outline

The book integrates *empiric studies* approaching cross-level hybridity which affects diverse types of HEIs in the Nordic countries – from *diverse angles*, and through *diverse methods*. The included chapters aim to understand how the emergence and prominence of hybridity at Nordic HEIs shape and are shaped by *core university tasks; formalised arrangements; and academic (cultural) postures and mindsets*. The book is divided into three sections. The first section offers a conceptual overview and introduces the chapters. The remaining two sections explore the contexts of hybridity: sudden crises and a slowly changing political environment. One context is marketisation, which has been reshaping and challenging academic work for decades. Despite being both a continuing and already experienced phenomenon, marketisation driven changes continue to be a source of turbulence for universities. The other context is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, which triggered an acute crisis in HE, compelling universities to adapt rapidly and often under considerable pressure. This was illustrated in Figure 1.1 above in which we positioned hybridity as a resilience mechanism, enabling institutions to respond to adversity triggers within their institutional environment.

5.1 *Conceptual Overview: Hybridity in Higher Education*

The first section of the book provides a conceptual foundation for the discussion on hybridity as a response for societal change. In Chapter 2 Johanson et al.

offer a conceptual overview by presenting hybridity as a characteristic of global HE. They focus on understanding hybridity of HE at different levels of societal activities and decision-making. The authors provide insights into the policy dimensions of HE by observing the politics in society and exploring how value creation evolves from viewing universities as standalone organisations to understanding their role in balancing societal values. In Chapter 3 Pöysä-Tarhonen provides a conceptual overview of the emerging hybridity in post-pandemic HE learning. She provides insights into transformation of the hybrid educational arrangements developed in response to COVID-19. The author analyses hybridity and hybrid educational spaces as tools for designing more resilient and sustainable educational agreements globally and within Nordic HEIs.

5.2 *Managing Crises Triggered by the Pandemic, War, and Digitalisation*

The second section of the book discusses hybridity as a response to pandemic and digitalisation development peaking during the Covid 19. In Chapter 4 Perkins studies the relationship between hybridity theory and crisis management using HEIs as a case. He explores the utility of hybrid theory, which focuses on, for example, conflicting demands, values, and norms, to facilitate understanding of crisis management. The chapter explores crisis leadership in hybrid organisations and offers insights on how to facilitate it across various types of organisations. In Chapter 5 Lundborg and Geschwind explore management during crises in Swedish HEIs. Managing hybrid organisations, such as HEIs, requires navigating complex expectations, including the external environment, but also taking the internal interests into account. The authors explore what happens to the complex structures of HEIs, which are easily influenced by their environments, when faced with disruptive crises.

The crises have also impacted the work practices and international relations in HE. In Chapter 6 Santos et al. examine the evolving forms of work in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the post-COVID-19 context. The transition from fully remote work during the pandemic to hybrid arrangements – combining on-site and remote work – has posed new challenges for HEI managers. The authors focus on how this shift has reshaped managerial practices and perspectives within Finnish universities. In Chapter 7 Juusola studies the nested hybridity in HE co-operation during unexpected situations, such as times of war. International HE collaboration is sensitive to global circumstances and to the current social and political dynamics. The author examines the moral justification of HE collaboration, at national, organisational and operational levels in Finland and Sweden, in the context of Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Above mentioned impacts of immediate crises do have longstanding influence. However, probably the most evident change factor for future HE is digitalisation. In Chapter 8 Tømte et al. study the impact of digitalisation on teaching practices focusing on Norwegian HE. They address the new type of academic teaching where teachers prepare lessons for both online and onsite students. The digitalised elements form a new kind of hybridity where the old manners blend with the new ones. The authors discuss the hybridisation of academic work and especially how digitalisation amplifies the hybridisation of teaching practices. In Chapter 9 Asante et al. studies the digitalisation process of Nordic universities and how it affects traditional teaching roles. They examine how the use of digital technologies in HE has contributed to the emergence of a hybrid environment. They further provide insights into the internal work relations between academics and stakeholders and students.

5.3 *Crises and Marketisation*

The third section of the book approaches hybridity as a response to more structural and long-term crises or issues changing the HE landscape. In Chapter 10 Rajala explores hybridity in terms of different accountabilities that manifest in teaching at HEIs. More specifically, the chapter compares market and quasi-market accountabilities arising from competition over students and funding at HEIs.

Two chapters in this section examine academic leadership within a changing environment. In Chapter 11 Hedmo and Waks study hybrid professionalism and analyse the roles, work tasks, and expectations related to academic leader positions (such as department heads and chairs) in Swedish public universities. In Chapter 12 Siekkinen et al. examine the hybrid roles of academic middle managers in Finnish universities. In this context, middle managers operate in dual capacities – as academic professionals and as organisational managers – navigating the demands of both roles within the university environment.

The HEIs respond to the new environment also by changing their governance and accountability structures. In Chapter 13 Mikkonen et al. explore the manifestation of hybridity at different levels of the nested systems of Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland and provide insights into how board members navigate and reflect on competing values in their governance roles.

When the overall operating landscape of HE changes, HEIs face multiple demands for accountability alongside growing expectations for collaboration with other societal actors. It is not only the work practices and steering that are becoming increasingly hybrid, but also new organisational actors who are navigating these changes. In Chapter 14 Kärkkäinen and Muhonen examine

the hybrid logics within knowledge brokering organisations, such as science academies. They focus on how knowledge brokering organisations' internal structures, values and activities shape the approach and conditions for good knowledge brokering. The authors elaborate on the role of academic research within the context of organisational hybridity in the Nordic HE, specifically Finland and Norway.

Overall, the chapters in this volume highlight hybridity as a defining feature of contemporary higher education, particularly within the Nordic context. In Chapter 15, Pekkola et al. conclude the book by summarising its key findings and political implications related to perceiving hybridity as a resilience mechanism for HEIs in a changing environment.

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Higher Education

Mongrel in the Making

Jan-Erik Johanson, Jarmo Vakkuri and Elias Pekkola

Abstract

This chapter delves into the dual perspectives of higher education (HE) as both liberal education and 'bildung', highlighting their individualistic and community-oriented aspects. The chapter examines the inherent tensions between these views and the necessity for hybrid solutions in global HE practices. The study uses Nordic and European examples to explore overlaps in HE politics, policy formation, university governance, identity formation, and value creation. By employing James Coleman's macro–micro–macro 'bathtub model', the chapter analyses how societal values and political goals influence micro-level processes within universities. The chapter underscores the impact of hybridity on the interaction between macro and micro levels, showing how broad political goals transform into organised actions that affect society as a whole. The chapter concludes with a discussion on policy design, governance, identity issues, and the balance of values in HE, promoting an understanding of how hybrid solutions address the complex demands of modern HE systems.

Keywords

hybridity – higher education – micro – macro – public policy – politics – bildung – liberal education – universities – identity – value creation

1 Introduction

The fundamental idea of higher education (HE) for society can be approached from the perspective of liberal education or 'bildung'. 'Bildung' is a concept that emphasises holistic personal development, self-cultivation, moral education, and the nurturing of individuals to become well-rounded, responsible citizens with a sense of cultural and ethical awareness. 'Bildung' integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth for a harmonious balance between knowledge

and character, which contrasts with the more liberal idea that HE prioritises academic freedom, critical thinking, and specialised knowledge acquisition (Korsgaard et al., 2024). In this way, the aspirations of advancing inner cultivation through devotion to work and the development of knowledge as an object in its own right as part of liberal education can be contrasted with the premise of 'bildung', which not only builds character for students but also renders them autonomous subjects and connects them with the state via their citizenship, allowing them to acquire a free mind of reason through emancipation (Barnett, 2021). While the view of liberal education emphasises the individual, subjective, and utilitarian character of HE, the perspective of 'bildung' points to the importance of social and community aspects of tertiary education. These two aspects are parallel and sometimes conflicting approaches (Taylor, 2017) that are based on different notions of HE politics. The social and community aspects of tertiary education can contribute to differential policy designs, governance of HE institutions, and assessment of value creation within institutions of HE, resulting in an idiosyncratic balance of values in society. Parallel and possibly conflicting conceptions of the fundamental nature of HE call for hybrid solutions for practical constellations within the global discourses and practices of the field.

This chapter begins with the idea of hybridity as a characteristic of global HE. The illustrative empirical findings originate mainly from Nordic and European experiences, although hybrid teaching practices have gained considerable attention in USA and Asia (Gudoniene, 2025). In this chapter, hybridity refers to the overlaps between existing lines of demarcation. We observe these lines within the politics of HE and the formation of public policies, as well as within governing universities, the formation of identities and value creation efforts, and the balance of values in society. A theoretical problem is how to understand the hybridity of HE at different levels of societal activities and decision-making. In other words, how can we extend the notion of hybridity from an organisational problem to other facets and contexts of societal activities (Kallunki and Kivistö, 2024). As a complex, multifaceted, and multilateral context of policy formation, HE provides an excellent case for this theorisation.

For a systematic inquiry, we employ the macro – micro – macro 'bathtub model' of the society by James Coleman (1990) and combine it with multiple mechanisms that channel the development of hybridity within HE (See Vakkuri et al., 2025). The overarching idea is that the aggregate combination of values produced by HE cannot be deduced from the aspect of political choices on the macro level. Instead, there is a need to unravel the entanglement of goals and values of HE in micro-processes within universities (Pekkola et al., 2022). Therefore, we aim to understand the impacts of hybridity on the

interaction between the macro and micro levels of analysis and use it to elucidate the mechanisms by which broad society-level political goals transform into organised action and how this action radiates back to society as a whole.

The focus of this chapter is on both the policy aspects of HE and on the value creation aspects in moving from universities as organisations to the balance of values in society (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017; Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020a). First, we discuss the framework of the analysis and then perform an analysis of HE policy on the basis of the integrative reading of previous studies. These include a discussion on HE and that of hybridity, as well as emergent attempts to combine these two strands of thought. Second, we highlight the policy design of HE and introduce new elements of the design. Third, we introduce the scaffolding of hybridity within universities and the governing and identity issues within facilities of HE facilities. Fourth, value creation in HE is described, and the balance of values is discussed. Last, we conclude the chapter with a discussion of the implication of hybridity within HE.

2 A Plunge in the Bathtub

Our framework (Figure 2.1) seeks to unravel the reciprocal nature of the hybridity of HE policy, in which the hybridity of politics transforms into the hybridity of organisational practices and in which hybrid practices of HE organisations transform, through structural arrangements, mutated identities, and value creation into the ‘hybridised value’, i.e. a balance among social, public and market values.

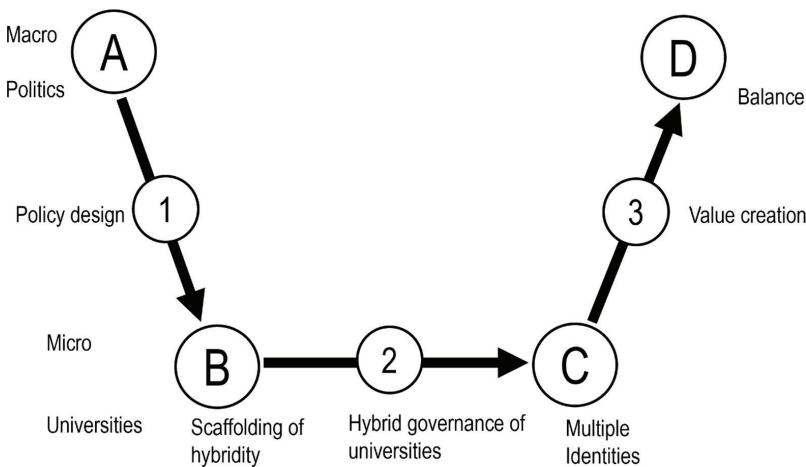


FIGURE 2.1 Higher education among fields and mechanisms of hybridity

Politics (A), scaffolding of hybridity (B), multiple identities (C), and balance (D) represent fields in the model that may exhibit different levels and types of hybridity. The notion of fields has two different reference points in the examination. On the one hand, they can be considered institutional fields composed of actors who share a common meaning system and are distinguished from their environment through social borders based on either an exchange or joint interest in specific issues (Zietsma et al., 2017). On the other hand, the fields can be considered causal spheres in which explanations are sought from the causes external to the field or within the differences between the actors in the field (Ylikoski, 2013). In the elaboration, politics and balance refer to the macro level in representing the society as a whole, while scaffolding and multiple identities correspond to the micro level aspects of hybridity within universities as organisations. It would be possible to include additional levels (e.g., meso, nano, and exo) in the analysis (Jepperson & Meyer 2017), but our chapter is based on the observation that multilevel analysis can be reduced to a certain number of dyadic models and that an elaboration of two levels works better for achieving parsimony.

The mechanisms of policy design (1), hybrid governance of universities (2), and value creation (3) function as transformation devices between macro and micro levels (1, 3) or among different fields within universities (2). It is possible to consider mechanisms causal agents that direct the political choices to organisational action and define aggregate balance of values in society. In a more interpretative tone, mechanisms appear as connecting devices within temporal processes in policy formation. Policy design incorporates the perspectives on HE embraced by politics, and value creation accumulates value for the aggregate balance of worth. Within universities, hybrid governance follows the form of scaffolding hybridity and influences the formation of multiple identities.

The policy design (1) signifies a first-order mechanism for influencing the properties of organised entities in specifying the broad educational goals as more tangible packages of administrative action. Extensions of the problem definition, a 'policy mix' of the employed tools, multiple perspectives of evaluation, and the scope of intervention strategy of the policy design contribute to the appearance of hybridity in HE policy. In an administrative system, the policy design results in a more or less hybrid structural arrangements or 'scaffolding' of the micro-operations within universities (B). Scaffolding refers to the construction of tangible hybrid organisational forms. It represents the hybridity of overlaps in ownership, parallel institutional logics or incongruent goals, sources of funding, and variety of control (Vakkuri et al., 2022) among entities operating within the HE policy field.

The valuation of everyday activities is dependent upon the strategies, structures, and availability of resources, as exemplified by the governance of HE among states, markets, and academic oligarchy (2) as a second-order mechanism (Clark, 1986). The multiple identities (Vignoles et al., 2011) exemplifies the central and meaningful composition of our actions by creating continuous distinctiveness among scholars, disciplines, institutional cultures, and communities of practice (C). These identities can adopt forms of mono, dual, or multiple identities among occupants within HE institutions (Albert & Whetten, 1985). The third mechanism (3) of value creation describes an active effort to construct well-being by calculating utilities of educational achievements, assessing the virtues that can be used for the benefit of others ('eudaimonia') and accounting for the benefits for the local communities. With multiple policy goals and several identities, a balancing act between alternative aspirations that includes activities performed to gain approval from academia, students, funders, and overseeing bodies (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2021b). The overall balance (D) of value represents an imaginary of the outcome of applying the rules of the game in entangling and disentangling the public, social, and market value across multiple activities (Vakkuri et al., 2025).

3 Politics and HE

The development of HE institutions followed the societal changes at different stages. As with all sectors and services in society, HE is part of the overall political development of societies. Drawing on the elaboration of Wilson's (1983) notion of regulation in politics, the type of distribution influences the possible coalition structures and interests of stakeholder groups. The distribution of costs and benefits is an embodiment of political choices, which is often difficult to change. Within HE, distributional forms materialise through gradual political shifts. From a historical perspective, the emergence of European cosmopolitan universities played a role in the destruction of the medieval world order during the Reformation, followed by the nationalisation of the universities and the entanglement of universities with religious wars. Universities gained importance during the formation of industrial societies, which resulted in the migration of the universities outside Europe and the transition from elite HE to mass HE in post-industrial society after World War II (Perkin, 2014).

One key insight into the intersection between politics and policy builds upon the increase in benefits and the costs of policy actions in society. Regarding the types of apportionment, the costs and benefits should not be considered solely in monetary terms as they may refer to a more abstract notion of

putting in one's effort and enjoying the benefits of the fruits of one's labour. The type of politics influences the pattern of government attention and influence. Majoritarian politics delegates both costs and benefits broadly, client politics concentrates benefits but diffuses cost. Further, entrepreneurial politics delegates benefits broadly but concentrates cost, and interest group politics concentrates both costs and benefits (Wilson, 1983). From a political point of view, there might be controversies over actual and desired type of politics, that is, in this case, with the distributional forms of tertiary education (Table 2.1).

Although HE in most of the Western countries and all of the Nordic countries has moved from the elite phase to massification and is close to universal HE (Trow, 1970, 2000), the politics of government involvement in HE revolves around three main viewpoints: (1) egalitarian, (2) regressive, and (3) institutional. First, from an egalitarian perspective, HE offers possibilities for upward social mobility, provides equal opportunities, and decreases inequality. This perspective can be associated with the Nordic welfare model (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and system of Nordic HE (Välilä, 2018). The delegation of benefits and costs might be broadly distributed from an egalitarian perspective, but the emergence of mass HE entails that a growing part of nations' resources devoted to the use of universities compete with attention to other policy issues (Trow, 1973).

Second, within a more regressive perspective, the affluent are expected to gain from the resources invested by others in HE. Even during the period of elite education before WWII, the investments and running costs of HE were

TABLE 2.1 Politics and apportionment in the creation of hybridity of HE

Type of politics	Perspective on HE	Method of apportionment	Nature of institution and lines of demarcation in HE
Majoritarian	Egalitarian	Diffuse cost and benefits	Inclusive, demarcation between specialisations
Client	Regressive	Concentrated benefits, diffuse cost	Selective, demarcation between levels of prestige
Entrepreneurial	Missionary	Concentrated cost, diffuse benefits	Denominational, demarcation between myths
Interest group	Elite	Concentrated benefits and cost	Exclusive, demarcation between locations

financed predominantly by the state, and some forms of student grants were available throughout Europe; however, the indirect cost of withholding young people from paid labour for extensive periods was a decisive factor in decreasing the attendance at universities of children from less affluent families (Gerbod, 2012). From a regressive perspective of preserving status differences, government spending on HE is inciting for the middle classes as family background increases the odds of the offspring acquiring academic degrees and attendance at top institutions and the wealth of a family offers better possibilities for using academic achievements for one's gain. However, the proportion of the age cohort attending HE and the level of tuition fees blur the influence of the types of politics. The higher proportion of age cohorts receiving university education dilutes the impact of family background (Ansell, 2008), and in contrast, the increase in tuition fees decreases the attendance of students from less affluent backgrounds (Garritzman, 2017). An illustrative example of the regressive perspective of HE policy is the Finnish discourse on tuition fees, which are opposed by the entire student movement independent of political background as a shared interest, social democrats as an avenue for upward social transition, and conservatives as an earned privilege and a legitimating factor for the current social structures and *status quo*.

Third, institutional explanations for government spending patterns propose the importance of path dependence, which relates to both elite and missionary perspectives. The institutions change slowly and the decisions made by the previous rulers orient the current actions, which restricts partisan options for increasing or decreasing spending on HE (Garritzmann et al., 2021). The institutional explanation proposes the importance of delegating costs and benefits at the point of origin, which cannot be changed quickly. In a historical sense, some of the origins of the university system are denominations related to religious beliefs. The evolution of government followed the ability to use literate catholic priests who were educated and remunerated by the church to operate the proto-governments in the early Middle Ages in Europe (missionary perspective). The quasi-monopoly of the church in supplying expert knowledge for the running of the state was welcomed by the weak political authority. In return, the catholic church acquired considerable influence over secular state-building attempts (Hollenbach and Pierskalla, 2020). The entanglement of politics and religion resulted in the displacement of priests by laymen in the government (Ertman, 1997; Rueschemeyer, 2005), which induced the need to educate the governing elite within institutions other than the church (elite perspective). Notwithstanding, the reality behind official policy is that even in the Nordic countries, HE has retained many elitist features, for example, the inheritance of elite professions such as medical doctors in Finland showcases (Kalalahti & Nori, 2023).

The religious past is still seen in many universities in the form of old structures and capital. Although the religious logic in the mission of HE institutions is absent in advanced industrialised nations, many scholars continue to advocate the “missionary” role of HE. For instance, the idea of an entrepreneurial university (Clark, 1998) as a normative agenda has been one of the most used approaches in HE studies; the triple (quadruple, quintuple, etc.) helix models (Leidersdorf, 2012), which position universities in the role of saviour of economic growth and science and universities as forerunners for science and technology investments, are other applied methods.

The lines of demarcation point to spheres for separate activities. The notion of hybridity in this context refers to the overlap between the distinct spheres; however, the lines for crossing over are different according to the types of politics and methods of apportionment. Even within most comprehensive and unitary egalitarian HE systems, the lines between disciplines and specialisations are relevant lines between institutions within universities. The hybridity appears in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary efforts across lines of specialisation. The status differences between university facilities add to the differentiation between specialisations and introduce a more nuanced aspect of hybridity in connecting universities with higher and lower status according to the regressive perspective. The missionary perspective uses a belief system as a starting point, in which the hybridisation in the fundamental sense could occur by the amalgamation of myths into a novel belief system. If we assume that the education of a small elite to govern society requires approximately a similar knowledge base, the demarcation lines and points of overlap between educational institutions are geographical rather than substantive.

The delegation of costs and benefits does not provide straightforward information about the causal links between politics and HE policy. However, the perspectives on HE offer hints on the level of government intervention. It is likely that an egalitarian perspective invites extensive government presence in policy formation and that missionary perspective allows for much larger stakeholder influence with restricted government engagement. Further, elite and regressive perspectives would hold a middle ground in their association with the political interests.

4 Policy Design

Peters and Fontaine (2022) consider policy design an analytic framework that integrates different aspects in an overall strategy to make the policy work by defining causal assumptions to solve policy problems, providing possible instruments for problem-solving, and enabling evaluation of the success of

the achieved outcomes. Evidently, the overall strategy behind the new public management reforms has been a powerful causal agent for shaping the administrative landscape in industrialised nations (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). HE institutions have not evaded the influence of market-emulation reforms within government beginning in the 1980's. On the one hand, in many cases, universities have been granted more autonomy; on the other hand, they are faced with more intense indirect output control over performance based on success in attracting outside funding and producing degrees and publications, which have been followed by the introduction of metrics for assessing the output of labour as well as the prestige of the institutions as a whole (Erkkilä, 2014). Globally, the assumed causal link between sciences and usable knowledge for technological advancement has resulted in emphasis on favouring sciences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects (Mudaly & Chircure, 2023), as portrayed by the deterioration in position of humanities.

Technological advancement through innovations has been one motivating force in supporting HE with the hope that the development of innovations would give mature industrialised countries a competitive edge over newly industrialised nations through the interactions among academia, government, and business through manifold 'helix' arrangements (Etzkowitz et al., 2023). It seems that HE institutions themselves are very persistent structurally, and the university–industry interaction tends to be industry-specific with little spillover of knowledge across industries (Guan & Chen, 2012). From a dynamic viewpoint, the accumulation of national wealth serves as both a result of knowledge creation and a source of that knowledge creation's augmentation, which protects the already achieved positions of industrialised nations. Existing national wealth gives industrial countries a head start, as their high-income levels enable further promotion of both innovation and absorptive capacity (Castellacci & Natera, 2013; Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017).

Following the new public management reforms and strong criticisms of the introduction of market logic in HE, alternative approaches to HE administration have been introduced. Most notably, there is a notion of network governance in HE, which emphasises the change in management environment in HE from bureaucratic implementation to a more strategic posture. However, building on the work of public administration scholarship (Greve, 2015; Reiter & Klenk, 2019), Kanniainen et al. (2021) indicate that many other public administration conceptualisations, such as digital governance, collaborative governance, new public governance, public value management, and co-production, have not been widely used as a frame of reference in HE discussion.

Currently, the governance of HE involves a greater range of actors and interconnections (Ferlie et al., 2008). The government's role has shifted to that of a facilitator of relationships rather than a direct steering agency. On the one

hand, power has been decentralised from the national level to universities. On the other hand, it has also moved to a higher level within the European Union. Additionally, universities have increased their self-organising power, accountability structures have changed. This has led to a shift in the role of managers, who are no longer focused solely on internal matters but are also accountable to external stakeholders. Managers are now expected to act as network managers and collaborators and to address the needs of multiple stakeholder groups.

Even though new administrative paradigms and concepts are not widely discussed in the HE context, these developments can be observed in empirical reality, and some studies address co-production, for example, in the field of pedagogy and science studies (Kanniainen et al., 2021). Consequently, although research on the topic of administration within the field of HE is underdeveloped, the emerging consequences of alternative conceptualisations are also evident at universities, as noted by Pekkola et al. (2018).

As an example, collaborative governance and cooperative practices have been included in HE policies, the third mission of universities – to contribute to societal and economic development beyond traditional teaching and research – has been incorporated into university legislation, and universities' funding sources have diversified. This mission encompasses activities such as community engagement, innovation, and regional development. Unlike teaching, which focuses on educating students, and research, which is aimed at generating new knowledge, the third mission involves practical applications of knowledge to address societal challenges. The third mission emphasises collaboration with external stakeholders to create impactful solutions (Arranguren & Larrea, 2016). This has resulted in an increased role for external stakeholders and customers in the management that emphasises quality assurance (Pekkola et al., 2018). Within the Nordic context, the Norwegian government pushed universities to collaborate and engage in dialogue within the private sector in the 2010's by introducing dialogue on development contracts that were not connected to funding (Elken, 2024).

Further, digital governance has had a profound impact on universities. Regarding policy design, there has been an emphasis on open science and platforms that provide access to learning content, courses, and qualifications, as well as digital accreditation. Within universities, digital governance has introduced new forms of control over work, such as online feedback and teaching evaluations and real-time tracking of citations and other bibliometric indices. This has resulted in a separation between academic outputs (e.g., teaching) and academics, especially as content has become digitalised, in addition to emerging issues related to intellectual property rights. (Pekkola & Kivistö, 2019). Some scholars have been concerned with the impact of information

technology (IT)-based measurement systems on scholarly argumentation and even proposed that digital governance, if it is detached from academic reality, might endanger the enlightenment and knowledge-based society and encourage the post-truth element in science (Nørreklit et al., 2019.)

There is some indication of public value management in the HE sector. The focus of HE management and governance has shifted toward autonomous institutions that follow their strategies. External quality assurance practices and state subsidies are often linked to these institutional goals. Universities are increasingly pressured to define their societal impact and relevance and work toward these goals. Among overseeing bodies, including that of the European Union, there have been multiple attempts to define and categorise universities based on their performance and effectiveness, as revealed by the development of rankings to compare institutions. Managers such as rectors and deans are increasingly collaborating with stakeholders, seeking external funding, and legitimising their activities to multiple audiences. Further, universities have developed internal dashboards and follow-up mechanisms to track their progress. (Pekkola & Kivistö, 2019). On the basis of these changes, Broucker et al. (2017) have proposed that public value can serve as a concept to reintroduce the societal missions of HE to the discussion of market-driven governance reforms in HE and to call the involvement of stakeholders to the definition of public value in HE.

5 Scaffolding of Hybridity

The interactions among public, private, and civil society via distinct modes of ownership, parallel but often competing institutional logics or incongruous goals, diverse funding bases, and various forms of social and institutional control exemplify the hybrid characteristics within universities. As hybrid organisations, HE institutions might have owners other than the government, might follow parallel and sometimes conflicting institutional logics or goals, and can gather both public and private funding. Furthermore, a combination of government control, self-control, and stakeholder influence signify a hybrid control regime of universities (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017; Grossi et al., 2017).

Within the Nordic context, universities are predominantly public in terms of ownership and funding, although private universities with business education and those with religious denominations exist in Iceland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (Johanssdottir & Jonasson, 2011). However, the increase in the multiplicity of funding sources from public and private pockets is, according to some scholars, transforming universities into “entrepreneurial” institutions

(Etzkowitz et al., 1998; Modell, 2003). Further, Zmas (2020) argues that an ongoing nonlinear metamorphosis, in which boundaries between private and public universities are becoming more blurred, occurs.

Within the public university system, the autonomous position of the universities separates them from public agencies under the guidance of the ministries. Thus, based on the idiosyncratic governance structures of universities, who owns the universities remains ambiguous. Universities are often allowed to exercise considerable self-control over their internal operations. Within the Nordic context and elsewhere, the HE policy has introduced tripartite objectives into the mission of universities among research, education, and the 'third mission' (Vakkuri, 2004). Among hybrid organisations and activities, universities are a particular context. It is not easy to characterise universities as purely public or private. They may be considered hybrids according to all four characteristics of hybrid activities: ownership, parallel institutional logics or incongruous goals, diversity of funding, and control practices. The practical consequence of these structural ambiguities is that governance of universities becomes more complicated, in which third mission activities provide a further challenge.

In HE policy, a discourse on the 'third mission' has gained momentum in recent decades (Pinheiro et al., 2015a). In practice, the third mission includes activities such as technology commercialisation, entrepreneurial efforts, advisory services, commercial use of facilities, contract research, collaboration in academic research, staff exchanges, student placements, curriculum alignment, social networking, and non-academic dissemination (Molas-Gallart et al., 2002). Thus, the third mission introduces a new institutional logic that competes with the traditional roles of the professional scholarly community and the democratic student movement. Various measurement schemes, for policy design and managerial purposes within universities, have been developed to capture universities' third mission activities (Pinheiro et al., 2015b).

In the Nordic countries, there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of the third mission, and the boundaries between the first, second, and third missions remain a subject of debate. An important distinction in the Nordic context is between nonprofit and for-profit activities, as the third mission discourse is often linked to the idea of the Nordic welfare model. Nordic HE institutions are considered integral to this structure. Based on an extensive literature review by Schnurbus and Edvardsson (2020), the third mission has been largely socialised in Nordic countries. University services are often assumed to be free of charge, with companies and other stakeholders unwilling to pay the full cost of these services. As a result, the government is expected to fund third mission activities, resulting in a top-down approach to defining these activities.

The third mission activities are framed differently within the Nordic countries (Schnurbus & Edvardsson, 2020). The third mission is typically associated with entrepreneurial activities and commercialisation in Sweden, whereas in Norway, the third mission is linked to regional engagement. In Denmark, industrial engagement and entrepreneurship are emphasised, whereas in Finland, the third mission encompasses a broad range of regional and stakeholder participation in societal development, including activities by universities of applied sciences and university centres.

6 Hybrid Governance of Universities

Specifically, the significance of hybridity within universities can be described in terms of organisational goals and mission, the structures of the universities, and the operation and practices for mobilising resources across societal boundaries (See Anheier & Krlev, 2015). The characteristic aspect of hybridity is that it incorporates multiple goals, such as addressing demands of the government, businesses or those of local communities. With incongruous goals or parallel institutional logics, structural separation of activities might offer a solution to, for example, separate the third mission from research and education. The integration of research, education, and a third mission by assimilation and blending might form the basis for a new logic of operation. Further, controversies between differentiated goals and internal cleavages may block possibilities for adapting organisational structures to the demands of multiple stakeholders (Skelcher & Smith, 2015). Multipolar objectives imply that many relevant audiences require justification for the rationality of actions. Therefore, universities need to invest a considerable amount of attention in proving to their audiences that their activities are worthwhile, in terms of both their aims and their performance to garner a variety of resources. In this way, minimising the cost of collaborative governance becomes one subject of economising behaviour.

The triangle of coordination among the state, the academic oligarchy, and the markets in HE systems entails the control of the government and the markets as well as the self-control and peer pressure exerted by the academic profession itself (Clark, 1986). These control forces are understood as mutually exclusive, which implies that for a given HE system, the decrease in state control would result in more control by either the markets or the academic oligarchy. This may implicate higher resource dependency on the markets (external sources of funding) and/or more locally determined forms of coordination and control. Although this may be a somewhat constraining assumption (i.e. many HE systems worldwide may be influenced by parallel and simultaneous

changes of policy control), it enables us to understand the notion of hybridity in the context of HE systems. Moreover, as general categories, the markets, the state, and the academic oligarchy involve different types of organisations, institutions, and actors. Olsen (2007) has created four visions for universities on the basis of two dimensions of autonomy and conflict. In a policy environment in which universities have high autonomy and actors have a shared understanding of norms and objectives, universities can be developed as a self-governing community of scholars that are governed by external factors. Without conflict, they can become instruments for national policy measures. During times of conflict, universities that are governed internally might develop into representative democracies, and, in the case of strong external steering, may ultimately embrace business orientation in competitive markets.

There are multiple possible roles for the university management described by the participation of academic staff in management and the professional autonomy of academics. A combination of high professional autonomy with academics participating in management establishes the building of ground collegial management models, in which the managerial role as the first among equals (*Primus inter pares*) is not distinct. High levels of professional autonomy and low levels of participation describe the bureaucratic model. Low professional autonomy might result in entrepreneurial management if the participation is vibrant, but the lack of participation allows a managerial model to emerge (Farnham, 1999). Thus, on the basis of the management structures and an understanding of the university as an organisation, the outputs and quality can be framed and evaluated rather differently (Kivistö & Pekkola, 2017).

The HE development has resulted in ambivalent choices. On the one hand, the blurring of boundaries between society and the university institution has narrowed the gap between pure research and applied research, which has not only created significant opportunities for universities to benefit from their commercialisation of scientific activities but also constituted new groups of 'haves' and 'have-nots' among universities (Powell & Owen-Smith, 1998). The triangle of coordination is a fertile building ground for separate identities between those who adhere to government stipulations, those who embrace knowledge generation, and those who address commercial activities.

7 Multiple Identities

Identity is a human response to questions about who we are. Both individual and collective points of reference and relational characteristics exist when people relate their own identities to those of others. Relational identities grow

out of interpersonal interaction in a variety of roles, for instance, as a spouse, coworker, or customer. Collective identities are formed through group membership in a community, organisation, ethnic group, nation, or religion. Material identities pertain to things other than social interaction, such as physical places and concrete tangible artefacts (Vignoles et al., 2011). Educational institutions including those within HE are notoriously ambiguous in terms of their identities to the extent that only the shared parking lot might define the collective nature of a HE facility. However, this does not mean that universities would be incapable of responsive action but that these responses occur within parts of the whole in a loosely coupled fashion in which parts retain their own identity (Weick, 1976).

In an organisational setting, identity serves as an instrument for identification to introduce the most essential characteristics of an organisation, to distinguish an organisation from other organisations and to demonstrate such identity characteristics over time (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Identities can be of different types: a single identity, a dual identity with competing, often contrasting mental models and belief systems, and multiple identities with a bricolage of identity implications for institutional behaviours. For instance, when teaching-oriented universities try to become a more research type of institution, it is not a question of concentrating on the research efforts as the transformation changes the division of labour between junior and senior faculty members, puts established practices in motion, and requires identity work of all the members to adapt to the new context (Dugas et al., 2020). The complex characteristics of a hybrid organisation may render a black-and-white statement of its identity narrow and subject to gaming behaviours. We may fail to see the holographic and ideographic form of identities, in which faculties and disciplines exhibit the features of the university as a whole or in which the composite identity is merely an aggregated set of identities of individual units (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

In their investigation of three aspects of university identity – constructing boundaries, controlling collective resources, and being a special organisation, Seeber et al. (2015) found no uniform move to more rational and hierarchical types of organisations in European universities. Traditional loosely coupled institutions exist in tandem with more managerial institutions. Organisational aspects such as age or size have little effect on the type of identity, but a specialised disciplinary profile coincides with the perception of perceiving one's own HE facility as a special organisation. In other words, universities as 'multiple-identity' hybrid organisations that comprise competing utilitarian managerial and professional beliefs challenge the existence of unitary and stable cultural identity (Winter & Bolden, 2020). However, the existence of multiple identities

is not only a question of controversy as it radiates to the appreciation of different types of values, which will be discussed in the next section.

8 Value Creation

The valorisation efforts (Vatin, 2013) of universities can be described by three different mechanisms: mixing, compromising, and legitimising. Mixing, compromising and legitimising mechanisms originate from the important blueprints of hybrid organisations and entities. By acknowledging the plethora of value creation literature and research, we frame them as instrumental in connecting hybridity characteristics with multifaceted notions of value and values; things that we hold dear in our lives. First, value has a mixed and therefore ambiguous character (Meynhardt, 2009). As universities are encouraged to simultaneously provide distinct categories of value, mixing as a value-creation mechanism becomes important. Mixing refers to the process of combining previously created or existing value categories with the aim of creating novel variants, blends, and layers of value (Nicholls, 2009). Second, the governance of competing, contradictory, and even conflictual values in universities and HE policy necessitates innovative mechanisms of compromising. Hybridised policy formation incentivises and sometimes forces the reconciliation of competing value-creation logics by pursuing compromises between different value propositions, funding systems, and performance measurements (Campanale et al., 2020). Third, legitimacy is a crucial concern for universities as hybrids. There are multiple legitimacy demands from external audiences, society, and media that may impose constraints, limitations, and important performance measurement problems. However, the same demands may be opportunities for manoeuvring that can benefit from the multiplicity and fluidity of legitimisation requirements (Karré, 2020). Moreover, legitimising value is not only about justifying past activities of hybrid universities or HE policies but also about creating value through the processes of legitimisation and showing integrity before multiple audiences (Moore, 2013).

HE policy is significantly influenced by disciplinary frameworks of intellectual scrutiny. HE policy is aimed at mixing disciplinary areas of scientific research by blending them to contribute to the mission of multidisciplinary and the common body of knowledge. This is a process of amalgamating novel mixes of scientific value from original elements of value, in which new elements are no longer discernible from old elements (Polzer et al., 2016; Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020a). The ideal of multidisciplinary motivates scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds to seek “theories of everything” to leave their

mark on the scientific system of knowledge. However, a unified common body of knowledge on complex phenomena is scarce. Accordingly, in HE policies, mixing can also be inter-disciplinary, in which research efforts are mobilised to serve unique local missions and purposes of disciplines. This mixing process contributes to the common body of knowledge but within the boundaries and rule systems of individual academic tribes. Mixing can be transdisciplinary in nature (Gibbons et al., 1994). This point is explained by the research-practice interchange of several research topics, the development of which is driven not only by the accumulation of scientific disciplinary knowledge but also by the intricate interactions between theoretical design and institutional practices of organisations in governments, business fields, and civic activities. Transdisciplinary mixing can be understood as reciprocity between theory building and practice theories (Orlikowski, 2002), as well as policy systems of administrative pragmatism (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017).

In many respects, HE policy is a system of compromising and compromises. While HE policy pursues excellence and novelty in research, it needs to balance this novelty with several other interests and constituencies. The outcome of this compromise can be seen in the three tasks of modern universities: research, teaching, and the third mission (Pinheiro et al., 2015a). As Neave (2002) formulates, historically the university institution has bundled the scientific knowledge production and the socialisation of the new generations into the social order through HE. This bundling has been facilitated by the evolution of knowledge itself. Furthermore, to respond to the evolving nature of knowledge, the university institution has deliberately remained open to new expectations by the society and local actors, thus assimilating new responsibilities, such as the third mission. In terms of HE value creation efforts, the third mission is based on the reasoning that the value and institutional survival of HE policy is related to its success in muddling through the proliferating needs of the society. Compromising among the three tasks has increased new modes of ambivalence in the university institution and in HE policy, as well as among individual academics. For instance, while the legitimate role of a university academic may be to educate the next generation of scientists, she should not do this at the expense of advancing knowledge. This ambivalence regarding the logic of compromising also reads perfectly in reverse (Merton, 1976).

Following the distinction between the state, the academic oligarchy, and the markets, Clark (1986) points to the problems in understanding the legitimisation of value from a single unitary perspective in HE. From the government's point of view, the fulfilment of HE policy goals and the augmentation of nations' intellectual capital are at the forefront. For an academic oligarchy, the value is created through high-quality teaching and the generation of new

knowledge. As with the markets, universities are service providers capable of adding value by providing students with qualities that enable their employment, increase the profitability of their business partners, and invigorate the élan of their local surroundings. In a sense, it is an asset to be able to legitimise activities by satisfying values of several stakeholders simultaneously, but it also implies that there are audience-specific claims at play. For universities, it is possible to select indices according to the audience and select the stages that are most favourable for the presentation of the value creation efforts, but the variety of claims to value creation remains.

A managerial solution to differentiated value creation has been to increase the number of indices to grasp the multitude of efforts through performance measurement (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020b). However, the performance measurement systems are not flawless instruments for detecting the development of manifold goals, which in the aggregate results in a discrepancy between the actual ('real') performance and that provided by the measurement instrument. The increased amount of indices may disorient actions from the aspired direction (Koppell, 2005). The use of only a few indices for the totality of actions may distort goal setting, excessively low targets do not encourage further efforts, anchoring goals to previous achievement might decrease output, and rigid targets may result in harsh treatment of students and dishonest representation of the measurement results, among other things (Pollitt, 2013).

For universities and HE policy, the ultimate question remains: which of the multiple audiences should be convinced at any given point in time (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020b). The overarching significance of value creation regimes to the macro balance of values in society lies in the notion that the enumeration practices of value creation define the ways in which value can be aggregated in society as a whole. This topic is discussed in the next section.

9 The Balance

Hybridised policy formation contributes to a complex, multifaceted, and aggregated configuration of values within HE. The value of liberal education and that of a 'bildung' occupy joint positions in the bottom line of HE. One approach to conceptualising this configuration is to discuss 'balance' as a combination of market, public, and social value (cf. Stark, 2009). In this chapter, market value is understood through the mechanism of exchange, which refers to the monetised form of worth that manifests in the transactional systems of societies. Market value often coalesces with the notion of financial value to make value calculable and governable. Undoubtedly, the commercialisation of

knowledge production and the advancement of gross domestic product (GDP) through innovations give impetus to supporting HE institutions. In contrast, public and social values have been regarded as something not to be encapsulated through market transactions or their residuals only. Rather, public and social values constitute part of the 'bildung' in cultivating individuals as members of society. The idea of public value and social value represents something that has a life of its own that would contribute to other than financial goals (Meynhardt, 2009). In contrast to hedonism as an important part of utilitarianism, another tradition can be traced to Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia, which states that true happiness requires the identification and cultivation of one's virtues and living according to them. People should develop what is best in themselves and use these qualities in the service of the greater good (Peterson et al., 2005) and that of their communities (Schumpeter, 1909).

As one of the fundamental mechanisms of political systems, the distributional balance within HE defies global monolithic rationality through the mosaic-like imaginary of distributed local rationalities, as well as a collection of voices and identities of people. The aggregate worth of universities and HE policy is not the only goal of societies; instead, it is relevant as to how worth is distributed among distinct parts of society. Fair and legitimate distribution becomes particularly complicated when the costs and benefits of policies are not easily allocated among groups of people and institutions, between societal sectors or across distinct, competing, and conflicting value constellations. Thus, hybridised policy formation in HE provides an interesting yet highly complex setting for exploring distributive problems.

10 Hybrid Higher Education and Beyond

It has been suggested that because of genuine political differences, position of education and HE in particular presents a special case in social policies (Blakemore & Warwick-Booth, 2013). Differences among political denominations and interest affiliations put different pressures on policy formation. The advancement of the knowledge economy emphasises the importance of intellectual capital provided by HE. The future professional workforce is a product of HE, but the acquired knowledge enables the formation of meaningful relationships within society by acquiring an active role as a citizen of the community.

The main contribution of this chapter is to highlight the macro – micro structure within the HE policy area. The main argument of the chapter is that the aggregate value and the delegation of values as represented by the balance of HE cannot be inferred directly from the macro-level political choices

in society. Instead, we have proposed a model in which politics orients the formation of policies, which results in the balance through a hybrid nature of organising and governing universities, formation of identities, and a variety of value-creation efforts. The micro-developments within universities shape, mutate, and resist political intervention, which has worked towards plurality of modes of operation rather than for uniformity of action.

In a more practical tone, the advancement of the knowledge society places higher education at the forefront of progressive political agendas, but the expansion of tertiary education creates competition with other policy areas and raises differing views on the distribution of costs and benefits among citizens. Hybrid arrangements in universities are subject to political influence and government oversight, yet command and control methods are often ineffective as universities adapt locally and decentralise through their multiple identities. This hybridity demands advanced governance skills within universities and contextual understanding from regulators. It is unrealistic to view hybridity as a clear path to success or failure; rather, it is a fundamental aspect of HE policy. The challenge lies in measuring university performance through a single perspective. Universities can generate public, financial, and social value, but the distribution of these values depends on the prioritisation of economic growth, participation, equality, and community development.

As organisations, universities represent ambiguous qualities in terms of ownership, parallel, and sometimes contradicting institutional logic and goals, variety in the source of funding, and differentiated forms of economic and social control. These aspects make it difficult to govern universities as unitary entities. The pressures placed on more entrepreneurial and managerial HE facilities have not been realised within universities. However, in this respect, the difference between public and private universities might be blurring, with private universities moving to produce public value and public universities adapting insight from managing private facilities of tertiary education. In empirical reality, managerial models are blended with features of educational institutions as loosely coupled systems described by lines of specialisations, disciplinary orientations, and academic tribes. The identities within research and teaching evolve slowly and in structural terms, and universities have shown considerable resilience to both continuity and change. Some of the resilience may be explained, at least better understood, by the analysis of this chapter. With hybrid construction, universities have been and will be able to respond to external pressures while preserving their unique idiosyncratic identities. Respectively, the future success of HE policies will be to some extent conditional on understanding the myriad characteristics of this hybridity.

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Emerging Hybridity in Higher Education

From Market-Inspired Educational Offerings towards Inclusive, Fluid Educational Spaces

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Abstract

While (re)imagining higher education institutions in the post-pandemic era, multifaceted transformations are apparent. One such transformation, evolving from the accumulated experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, involves a growing number of universities considering hybrid educational spaces as a strategic means of expanding educational access to broader audiences and addressing physical space constraints on campuses. Yet, despite extensive pandemic-related research, little is known about the potential futures and lasting implications of the hybrid educational arrangements developed in response. In particular, current understanding of *hybrid* remains limited, highlighting the need for a more nuanced conceptualisation. This chapter explores emerging hybridity in post-pandemic higher education, drawing on international developments with a specific focus on the Nordic context. It aims to contribute to the conceptual understanding of hybridity and to shift the discourse from market-inspired educational offerings towards a more inclusive experience of space – one in which there is no distinct divide between students attending in person and those participating digitally. Given the growing prominence of hybridity in higher education, the chapter argues for a deeper understanding of how to curate inclusive student experiences and design educational spaces capable of supporting sustainable and more robust hybrid educational arrangements.

Keywords

educational spaces – higher education – hybridity – post-pandemic education – sociomateriality – speculative design

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, digital resources and practices have gradually expanded across higher education landscapes (Lamb et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated this transition, rapidly increasing the role of digital technology in educational spaces on a global scale (Broadbent et al., 2023). This shift demonstrated universities' capacity to adapt to unprecedented circumstances with a level of agility previously unimagined (e.g., Goodyear, 2022; Lamb & Ross, 2021). It also stimulated the rise of hybridity in higher education (Lamb, Carvalho, et al., 2022; Lamb, Fawns, et al., 2024), thereby revealing its broader potential (Ortega-Arranz et al., 2024).

Although a considerable body of research has examined the rapid transitions in higher education during the pandemic (e.g., Aristovnik et al., 2020; Tulaskar & Turunen, 2022; Vollbrecht, 2020), little is known about the post-pandemic futures of higher education and the lasting implications of the educational arrangements developed in response (Broadbent et al., 2023). Globally, digitalisation has been discussed as “inevitable”, a fundamental aspect of this shift (Gourlay, 2021), including within Nordic universities (Laterza et al., 2020). According to Sá and Serpa (2020), this moment presents a pivotal opportunity to reform higher education to meet emerging educational needs – to give rise to renewal.

When (re)imagining the futures of higher education, multifaceted transformations are evident. One such transformation, shaped by the accumulated experiences of the pandemic, is the growing number of universities worldwide considering hybrid educational spaces as a strategic approach to expanding access to higher education (e.g., Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). This includes plans to open up courses and programmes to wider audiences in the coming years. In addition, there is a more practical motivation for adopting hybridity in educational arrangements, addressing the physical space constraints on campuses. As Ninnemann et al. (2020) observe, physical university campuses have limited resources and capacities, making indefinite expansion unfeasible. In other words, they cannot accommodate a continuous increase in student numbers, facilities, or activities without encountering constraints such as space, funding, and environmental impact (De Caro-Barek & Støckert, 2024).

Recently, the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) report (see *Global Sustainable Development Report*, 2023; *United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals*, 2023) has broadened its focus beyond socioeconomic, environmental, and technological developments to include higher education institutions and their role in advancing sustainability and societal development. This includes ensuring equal access to tertiary education, particularly from the perspective of lifelong learning (e.g., Håkansson Lindqvist

et al., 2023; Jaldemark et al., 2021; Nørgård, 2021). For many students, “equality” now implies more flexible and digitalised education, with a stronger emphasis on personalisation and openness to all (De Caro-Barek & Støckert, 2024). Building on this, the European University Association’s (EUA) policy manifesto, *Universities without walls* (EUA, 2021), argues that the effective implementation of hybrid or fully online educational spaces has become essential, even if physical presence on campus remains a standard feature for most higher education institutions (De Caro-Barek & Støckert, 2024). While the pandemic created favourable conditions for adopting new processes that support sustainable development in higher education (Sá & Serpa, 2020), it is not too early to reimagine universities as hybrid entities, comprising open physical and digital spaces, and nurturing both in their engagement with society.

The Nordic countries have long been recognised for their commitment to providing high-quality, tuition-free education at all levels of schooling. Higher education in these countries has traditionally prioritised equitable opportunities and access, ensuring that everyone can succeed on an equal footing (e.g., Bucholtz et al., 2020; Frønes et al., 2020). This commitment is evident in a continued focus on promoting fairness and inclusivity through both equity and equality (e.g., Frønes et al., 2020). It has included efforts to remove barriers that might prevent some students from participating in particular courses or academic programmes (Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2018), including an emphasis on technology-enhanced education (e.g., Frønes et al., 2020; Laterza et al., 2020; Pinheiro et al., 2023). Hybridity and hybrid educational spaces align closely with these values, as they offer the potential to dismantle barriers to accessing higher education.

At the same time, higher education institutions in the Nordic countries have faced increasing pressure to become more entrepreneurial (Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014) and to enhance their competitiveness in the globalised market, with a growing focus on cost efficiency, productivity, and quality (Kivistö et al., 2019; Lundin, 2024). This shift has led to significant changes, such as the introduction of tuition fees for international students (Lundin, 2024; Lundin & Geschwind, 2023). In this light, universities are increasingly aware that, in order to attract more and better students, digitalisation is inevitable and must be integrated across the entire educational process, including teaching materials and methods (Sá & Serpa, 2020). However, when opting for hybridity in higher education, it is essential to move beyond market-inspired educational offerings and prioritise the design of more inclusive hybrid spaces – where the aim is to bridge the gap between students attending in person and those participating remotely, fostering equitable learning experiences for all (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). That said, achieving this remains highly challenging.

As the pandemic demonstrated, the rapid shift to digital learning often prioritised the continuity of instruction over the quality of learning (Watermeyer et al., 2021), as exemplified by the concept of “emergency remote teaching” (Hodges et al., 2020). Most notably, these practices exposed the fragility of social interactions and raised global concerns about students’ social and academic integration (Costa et al., 2022). This challenge was particularly evident in learning contexts that relied on students’ collaboration and active engagement with peers (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). Nevertheless, substantial evidence indicates that shifting from solitary to collaborative learning can significantly enhance student outcomes (e.g., Heller, 2022; Herrera-Pavo, 2021). Increasingly, global policy bodies (e.g., Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021) also recognise the importance of collaboration in reimagining the futures of education.

Following Nørgård and Hilli (2022), in order to resist the dominance of market-inspired models in higher education, the focus should shift towards fostering competencies that extend beyond the immediate relevance of individual courses or programmes. This involves preparing students for the complex demands and uncertainties that characterise the contemporary world (Closs et al., 2022). In our increasingly interconnected society, where collaborative solutions are essential for addressing pressing global issues, it is necessary to gain deeper insights into how higher education spaces can be (re)designed to equip students with the capabilities, attitudes, and values required to work together on matters of significance and for the common good (Goodyear, 2022).

Taken together, the mandate of universities is evolving, with growing emphasis on sustainability and preparing students for uncertain futures. Moreover, the significant external shocks from the marketisation of higher education and the pandemic have also played a substantial role in accelerating this shift (e.g., Laterza et al., 2020). However, while the prominence of hybridity in higher education is widely acknowledged as a response to these challenges, current discourse often overemphasises the advantages of educational technology in (re)designing higher education teaching and learning (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). This somewhat narrow view limits the broader transformative potential of hybridity. To fully meet universities’ evolving, future-oriented sustainable mandate (De Caro-Barek & Støckert, 2024), a more nuanced understanding of hybridity is essential – one that goes beyond the short-term compromise solutions in teaching and learning seen in recent years (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). That is, to consider more broadly how the digital is entwined with human and material practices in postpandemic higher education teaching and learning (Markauskaite et al., 2023). This chapter contributes to that conversation

by exploring hybridity and hybrid educational spaces, particularly as vehicles for designing more resilient and sustainable educational arrangements, both globally and within Nordic higher education institutions.

The chapter is organised as follows. It begins by outlining the theoretical perspective of *hybrid educational spaces as fluid*, followed by a discussion of *sociomaterial sensitivities and new mobilities* that can deepen our understanding of these spaces. It then explores the potential of *speculative design* in shaping hybrid educational arrangements in higher education and in imagining their “possible futures” within this context. The chapter concludes by revisiting the *opportunities and challenges* of hybrid spaces in higher education, both globally and in relation to Nordic higher education institutions.

2 Hybrid Educational Spaces in Higher Education: Hybrid as Fluid

While the significance of hybridity and hybrid educational formats has grown considerably, the field remains under-theorised (Nørgård, 2021). The term *hybrid* originates from biology, where it refers to offspring resulting from the combination of traits from different breeds, species, or genera (Gil et al., 2022). In higher education, *hybrid* and *hybridity* have been interpreted in various ways. Although still a relatively niche concept, Nørgård (2021) observes that the term is often applied too broadly to describe a wide array of teaching and learning practices.

Nevertheless, hybrid educational spaces introduce distinct conceptualisations, theories, and characteristics that differentiate them from other digital or online formats (e.g., Hilli et al., 2019; Lamb et al., 2025; Nørgård, 2021; Nørgård & Hilli, 2022). Gil et al. (2022) argue that hybridity goes beyond the notion of *blending* – a term often used synonymously. While blending typically involves integrating digital tools into physical settings or combining synchronous and asynchronous interaction, online elements are often positioned as supplementary to the core activity of onsite teaching (Lamb et al., 2025). In contrast, hybridity encompasses a more complex coexistence of diverse modalities. It includes the interplay of formal and informal learning, structured and unstructured environments, physical and digital artefacts and spaces, as well as evolving teacher – student dynamics (e.g., Nørgård & Hilli, 2022). In this sense, hybridity represents a richer theoretical and practical construct – one that embodies the merging and co-existence of multiple educational elements (Eyal & Gil, 2022).

Accordingly, moving beyond discussions of purely technical or pedagogical arrangements that often dominate the discourse, this chapter adopts a more philosophical stance – one less commonly taken in this context (e.g., Eyal & Gil, 2022; Gourlay, 2021, 2022; Pöysä et al., 2005). Within this view, *hybrid* refers

to *fluid* as an experience of hybrid space in which the boundaries of formal dichotomies such as online – on-campus and with – without technology are blurred. Fluid spaces are continually able to change form and adapt to different spatial configurations (Bauman, 2013). However, due to the absence of clearly marked signs, capturing fluidity remains challenging (Eyal & Gil, 2022).

Likewise, this conceptualisation of fluidity also shifts our focus onto the student: it is the student's choice that transcends boundaries, rather than one that is externally imposed (Eyal & Gil, 2022). However, it is important to acknowledge the risk of casually labelling students as so called digital natives and assuming they can effortlessly engage with, and transition between, different modalities of learning (e.g., Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). Accordingly, in order to more successfully curate learning in hybrid higher education contexts, there is a need to critically examine the complex interplay among individual perspectives, technologies, spaces, activities, and time (Jandrić et al., 2018).

3 New Mobilities and Sociomaterial Sensibility in Understanding Hybrid Educational Spaces in Higher Education

Despite the variety of definitions, capturing and understanding the relationship between *physical* and *digital* as hybrid educational encounters remains a challenge in higher education research (e.g., Gourlay, 2021, 2022). As Gourlay (2021) notes, educational policy and practice often uphold a rigid binary between these two modes: *digital* is perceived as existing independently of the *physical*, and digital interactions are not considered to involve the body or the act of being *in person*. However, contrary to this dominant view, it can be argued – drawing on sociomaterial and posthuman perspectives – that digital engagement, such as hybrid encounters in higher education, is fundamentally a set of material and embodied practices (e.g., Gourlay, 2021, 2022), involving mobility and “movement” (Bayne et al., 2014). Hayles (2002) writes: *In its broadest sense, materiality emerges from the dynamic interplay between the richness of the physical world and human intelligence, which shapes this physicality to create meaning* (p. 33).

According to Sørensen (2009), a posthumanist perspective positions humans not above materials, but among them. Here, while materials may be used by humans, they can equally act upon humans – shaping and reshaping educational practices to become not solely human-centred but sociomaterial. From this standpoint, the question shifts from whether a technology meets the goals of actors – often an insufficient approach for understanding the complexity of hybrid arrangements in higher education learning – to examining what

practices emerge when specific configurations of social and material components are established. This perspective offers valuable insights into hybridity in higher education and the recent substantial investments in digital learning within this context.

Building on this, Gourlay (2021) poses the question of how the university can be “located” when the significance of materiality in digital engagement is acknowledged. Accordingly, the concept of *new mobilities* (e.g., Bayne et al., 2014; Scheller & Urry, 2006; Sprangler & Adriansen, 2019; Urry, 2007) provides insights into the intricate relationships between people and spaces connected through movement. Mobilities – or immobilities – in various forms, depend on a combination of material elements, including moorings such as physical campuses and the online world (Brooks & Waters, 2018). In this view, *movement* and *travel* are understood as active processes involving material components, rather than simply the absence between two fixed points. Moreover, this approach can offer valuable insights into hybridity in university settings – for example, in terms of how students, when interacting remotely, translate the space of the university into distance (Bayne et al., 2014). Hybrid learning requires us to think newly about higher education spaces and the various ways students are mobilised within them, as remote learning pushes students beyond the spatial securities (Mol & Law, 1994) of the physical campus.

In conclusion, as Lamb et al. (2022) point out, a sociomaterial sensibility discourages reducing educational spaces to their physical attributes or placing undue emphasis solely on teaching and learning practices. Instead, this perspective views educational spaces as contingent upon a complex and dynamic assemblage of diverse human and non-human actors (Fenwick, 2015). In educational contexts, different levels of materiality can be considered, including human bodies, other living organisms, objects, spaces, places, and the natural and built environments they encompass (e.g., Fox & Alldred, 2019). In addition, abstract concepts such as imagination, memory, and thought – while not inherently “material” – are also valued for their capacity to produce material effects. A sociomaterial approach thus recognises that a variety of actors – human and non-human alike – actively shape learning and social processes in education.

4 Speculative Design for “Possible Futures” of Hybrid Higher Education Arrangements

Curating inclusive student experiences and designing educational spaces that support sustainable and resilient hybrid arrangements can benefit significantly from a speculative design approach (e.g., Ross, 2017, 2023; Bayne

& Ross, 2024). Encompassing methods such as critical design and design fiction, speculative design offers a collaborative means of imagining and shaping expansive realities in which multiple future worlds may coexist (e.g., Costanza-Chock, 2020; Encinas et al., 2023; Ross, 2017, 2023). By posing generative questions like “What if?” and “What might be?”, it invites participants to explore diverse, open-ended futures (Lukens & DiSalvo, 2011; Bayne & Ross, 2024). The emphasis on *futures* in the plural reflects a commitment to envisioning multiple trajectories, intertwining past and prospective temporalities (e.g., Cerratto Pargman, 2023; Ross, 2017, 2023).

Speculative design introduces a “sphere of not-yetness” (Ross, 2017, 2023) into co-design processes (Lowyck & Pöysä, 2001), shifting the emphasis from merely identifying “what works” to fostering more imaginative and transformative forms of problem-solving (Ross, 2017). In the context of digital education, engaging with not-yetness involves acknowledging and embracing complexity, uncertainty, and risk as inherent to emerging technologies and their associated practices. While speculative design has moved beyond its roots in niche art and design domains, its application in education remains relatively limited, though gradually expanding (Encinas et al., 2023).

When critically engaging with digital education futures through speculative accounts, Ross (2023), drawing on Michael (2021), distinguishes between *speculative fabulation* and *speculative fabrication*. Practices of speculative fabulation typically employ storytelling methods – such as social science fiction and speculative fiction (e.g., Bayne & Ross, 2024; Macgilchrist et al., 2019; Suoranta et al., 2022) – often in the form of short fictional sketches, scenarios, or vignettes (e.g., Selwyn et al., 2020). According to Ross (2023), this approach enables participants to explore dilemmas and neglected areas often overlooked in dominant socio-technical imaginaries. As a recent example, Bayne and Ross (2024) explore how speculative fabulation can reimagine the futures of higher education beyond deterministic or dystopian narratives. Through four scenarios (*Extinction-era Universities*, *AI Academy*, *Enhanced Enhancement*, and *Justice-driven Innovation*), accompanied by microfictions, provoke critical reflection on themes such as AI, climate change, surveillance, enhancement technologies, and decolonisation.

In contrast, speculative fabrication focuses on speculative (material or digital) artefacts – *objects-to-think-with* – designed to prompt participant engagement and speculative production (Ross, 2023). These artefacts serve as generative catalysts, encouraging diverse participants to contribute their experiences, voices, and insights. Through designing and interacting with such objects, participants are able to grapple with inventive and ambiguous problems (see e.g., Gallagher & Breines, 2020; Vartiainen et al., 2024). However, the

categories of speculative accounts are overlapping, allowing for integrated and evolving modes of speculative inquiry (Ross, 2023). For example, Vartiainen et al. (2024) ran a speculative workshop where higher education students used text-to-image GenAI tools to explore design challenges and visualise biomimetic products addressing a future dystopian scenario, revealing how human-technology relationships take shape through co-design.

Goodyear (2022) advocates a speculative approach to the co-design of higher education spaces, and drawing on Fitzpatrick (2019), to emphasises that fostering sustainable futures in curriculum and pedagogy requires greater emphasis on collaboration and “careful listening”. This approach marks a departure from traditional models of direct instruction, positioning teaching as a co-design process in which multiple stakeholders actively shape educational experiences (e.g., Goodyear, 2015, 2020). Central to this vision is the use of conceptual tools that help connect immediate, practical decisions with long-term aspirations and preferred futures. However, Goodyear (2022) acknowledges the intellectual challenge of bridging micro-level decisions with macro-level goals, particularly in collaborative settings. In higher education, this complexity often arises in balancing creativity and criticality, and in efforts to move beyond narrowly specialised courses towards broader, more inclusive engagement (Encinas et al., 2023). In this context, as Laterza et al. (2020) and Scholkmann (2023) observe, the Nordic model of publicly funded higher education is especially promising, as it enables experimentation with innovative teaching practices, free from market-driven pressures or fears of declining enrolments – constraints that frequently affect institutions in less publicly supported systems.

5 Concluding Discussion

In the post-pandemic era, higher education institutions worldwide are debating the futures of hybrid educational offerings, even if campus-based teaching resumes as the default mode in many countries (De Caro-Barek & Støckert, 2024), including in the Nordic context (Pinheiro et al., 2023). Within this shifting landscape, discourse has turned towards the need for more adaptable teaching and learning practices, with greater possibilities to negotiate educational spaces based on individual needs (Taalas et al., 2022). Consequently, discussions about hybrid educational spaces have emerged (e.g., Guo & Mahat, 2023; Eyal & Gil, 2022; Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023; Nørgård, 2021; Nørgård & Hilli, 2022; Raes et al., 2020). In this chapter, *hybrid* refers to a rich, multifaceted, and fluid concept, extending far beyond the simple blending of physical

and digital educational modes (Eyal & Gil, 2022). When adequately designed, hybrid educational spaces hold great promise for enhancing and democratising higher education (Mor et al., 2022). However, realising this potential remains in its early stages and will require sustained research, along with practical and institutional efforts, to be fully achieved. As Lamb et al. (2022) further argue, a sociomaterial sensibility positions educational space as being influenced and continually reconfigured by a wider set of forces. These include not only educational practices and the presence of digital technologies but also the marketisation of higher education, institutional strategies, and government policies.

However, at the institutional and policy levels, while the pandemic accelerated a shift towards the adoption of hybrid educational offerings, such practices have traditionally been limited to isolated initiatives rather than strategically embedded across institutions (e.g., Ali, 2024; Hill & Smith, 2023). Given universities' growing commitment to flexibility, inclusivity, and accessibility in education (e.g., Hill & Smith, 2023), a deeper understanding of the factors that enable or constrain the thoughtful integration of on-campus and online learning is essential for informed decision-making and adequate resource allocation (e.g., Ali, 2024). According to Hill and Smith (2023), university leaders emphasise the importance of strategic leadership, effective governance, professional development for teaching staff, and sustained technical and pedagogical support as prerequisites for institution-wide transformation. In the context of hybrid cross-campus environments, De Caro-Barek and Støckert (2024) introduce *symmetry* as a central organising principle, referring to the equitable distribution of resources such as time, funding, infrastructure, and politically aligned strategies. As they point out, ensuring consistent and equitable learning experiences across campuses requires institutions to define, align, and manage these multiple layers of symmetry. As the rapid mobilisation to scale up digital learning during the pandemic demonstrated, barriers to adoption can be overcome through strong institutional commitment and targeted investment in change agendas grounded in strategy, structure, and support (Hill & Smith, 2023).

Moreover, hybridity is not about reducing costs or simplifying processes – it entails creating a new kind of learning experience, one that is both technologically and pedagogically complex (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). In the Nordic countries, higher education institutions typically benefit from robust digital infrastructures, which supported a relatively smooth transition to online and remote teaching during the pandemic (Pinheiro et al., 2023). Despite their growing prominence, it is worth remembering that hybrid educational spaces are neither neutral nor universally experienced. Their form and function are

shaped by broader social, political, and infrastructural conditions that differ widely across regions (Traxler, 2024). While Nordic systems are generally well-resourced, this is not the case globally – particularly beyond Western Europe and the connected Global North.

Furthermore, when considering the futures of educational offerings in higher education, even though the technologies for combining on-campus and online learning are already in place, the challenge lies in aligning digital technologies with appropriate pedagogical approaches. This has left teachers uncertain about how to successfully engage students in both settings (e.g., Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023; Pinheiro et al., 2023; Raes et al., 2020). Despite the widespread use and support of technology throughout the pandemic, designing for and teaching in hybrid mode continues to present challenges. For example, hybridity of teaching can increase teachers' orchestration load, particularly when designing and setting up collaborative activities using sophisticated technologies (e.g., Ortega-Arranz et al., 2024). Accordingly, careful consideration is needed from both a learning design and institutional support perspective (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023).

While teachers' roles have evolved due to the rapid digitalisation of teaching – towards what Dron (2022, p. 161) refers to as the “distributed teacher” – IT staff, in their roles as digital experts, have become increasingly visible and influential within universities, providing critical support to academics in digital teaching (Pinheiro et al., 2023). As Pinheiro et al. (2023) observe, in this way, digital transformations are also reshaping traditional academic roles and authority dynamics within universities.

To create an inclusive hybrid educational environment, a key consideration is to bring online and in-person students together without favouring one group over the other, whether consciously or unconsciously. This can be achieved by accommodating the needs of both groups through varied learning activities and modes of interaction. Designing a range of activities that promote different forms of engagement and intentionally fostering connections between students across modalities are effective strategies for making hybrid spaces more inclusive (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023).

Bayne et al. (2014) argue that, in digital education, the university should not be viewed as a static “container”. Instead, it should be understood as an “enactment” (Edwards et al., 2011), in which various human and non-human elements are brought together to generate specific activities at particular times and locations. Overall, when students and teachers come together for a course, they are present in multiple spaces where digital, physical, and social elements are deeply intertwined and mutually influential (Carvalho et al., 2016). As such,

digital technologies both shape and are shaped by the educational environments and practices they inhabit (Lamb et al., 2022).

To create improved opportunities and spaces for learning, imaginative and forward-thinking educational efforts are necessary (Goodyear, 2022). Goodyear draws on the work of Geoff Mulgan (2020), who reminds us that the social sciences have a long tradition of exploring better futures – a tradition that has been partially overshadowed by an emphasis on critique. Like many, Mulgan views the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for re-evaluating what is changeable and what is worth changing.

Applying a speculative co-design approach to imagining the futures of higher education offers a promising path towards achieving these goals. In this way, the futures are being reimagined not only by academic staff, administrators or policymakers, but also by students. Student voice and choice extend beyond merely selecting from different assignment options; they involve fostering a genuine sense of ownership over their learning (Penrod, 2023). This includes providing hybrid learning experiences that are not only accessible but also designed with inclusivity and equity in mind (Frønes et al., 2020). Such an approach calls for students, teachers, and other stakeholders to collaborate in developing a shared vision for the futures of higher education and to work collectively towards realising that vision. Additionally, given the current higher education landscape, Bayne and Ross (2024) highlight how the increasingly complex, technologised, and environmentally and politically unstable nature of the future can cause discussions about higher education to become quickly dominated by dystopian narratives and a sense of hopelessness. Rather than attempting to predict specific outcomes, speculative methods can instead open up space for creative, critical, and imaginative conversations that foster active and fundamental hope – to shape more equitable and sustainable futures of higher education learning (Bayne & Ross, 2024; see also Ross, 2023).

To conclude, digital transformations have now become integral to all aspects of higher education and, through emerging hybridity, have brought about profound changes to universities and academic work more broadly (e.g., Pekkola et al., 2020, 2022). While digital technologies are already woven into many aspects of teaching and learning, it follows that teachers' roles have also become "hybrid", with their knowledge and capabilities distributed across these technologies. In considering the emerging hybridity of educational spaces and the futures of higher education, it is therefore important to focus not only on students but also on the evolving roles and capabilities of (future) teachers. As Markauskaite et al. (2023, p. 182) aptly observe, these are *capabilities for teaching in universities that do not exist yet*.

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PART 2

Nordic Universities and Crisis



Hybridity Theory and Crisis

Observations from Finnish Higher Education Organizations in the Era of COVID-19

Marc C. Perkins

Abstract

Hybrid organizations are composed of and operate in an environment of contrasting, often competing, logics. Higher education organizations, a well-documented example of hybrid organizations, were used as a case to explore the relationship between hybridity theory and crisis management (i.e., all elements of preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crises at organizations). Data collected include interviews with leaders at a case-study Finnish university as well as panel discussions with staff from a diversity of Finnish higher education organizations.

This study's findings indicate that hybridity has potential as a theoretical framework to better understand crisis management. Changes in hybridity may be potential causes of crisis, crises may alter the hybridity of the organization, and altering the hybridity of the organization in response to crises may be a strategy for successful crisis leadership.

Keywords

crisis leadership – crisis management – Finland – higher education – hybridity – leadership – organizations

1 Introduction

Recent pandemics, wars, natural disasters, school violence, and other crises have illustrated the importance of leadership before, during, and after crises. At the same time, these events have also revealed the manifold ways in which crises can vary and overlap. This has led to conceptualizations that polycrisis could be a defining feature of, and important lens for understanding, our current era (Henig & Knight, 2023). Regardless of whether polycrisis is a novel feature of our era, crises are real, extremely variable, and create risks for higher

education organizations (HEOS) and those in their communities (Perkins et al., 2024). Recent reviews have called for additional theoretical work regarding crisis leadership and management, including in the educational realm (Riggio & Newstead, 2023; Striepe & Cunningham, 2021; Wu et al., 2021).

The concept of HEOS as hybrid organizations has recently gained prominence as a theory-based way to understand the structures underlying and the challenges faced by HEOS worldwide (e.g., Conrath-Hargreaves & Wüsteman, 2019; Pekkola et al., 2021). HEOS operate in an environment of varying policy directives, funding structures, and logics, with copious internal variation in values, governance mechanisms, operational characteristics, and even worker goals. Crises frequently apply pressures that expose and force the stark consideration of conflicting motivations, norms, and values. This makes hybridity theory's focus on conflicting demands, values, and norms potentially well-suited to facilitating an understanding of organizations undergoing crisis.

In this chapter I will empirically explore the utility of hybridity theory for understanding crisis management, through a thematic analysis of interview and panel discussion data collected from staff at Finnish HEOS from 2022–2024 (i.e., after the discovery and subsequent spread of SARS-CoV-2 in 2019; Zhu et al., 2019). While this chapter is based on data obtained from Finnish HEOS, due to hybridity theory's broad applicability across organizational contexts, contributions from hybridity theory to crisis management have the potential to be applicable to a wide array of organizations beyond those focused on in this work.

Next, this chapter will briefly review hybridity theory and crisis management before describing the research methods.

2 Background Literature and Theory

This section will limit its review of the literature on hybridity theory and crisis management to topics relevant to potential links between the two domains. Further contextual details regarding the Finnish higher education system can be found in Pekkola and colleagues (2021; on hybridity) and Kivistö and Kohtamäki (2022; on governance during COVID-19).

2.1 *Hybridity Theory*

Hybridity theory is an organizational theory that addresses the impacts of conflicting logics on organizations and those in them (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017). “Organizational logics” refers to the “material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules” that explicitly or implicitly direct the actions and

decisions of those in an organization (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Individual and societal logics are the same concept, just applied at their respective levels (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Conflicts emerge when differing logics (e.g., profit-focused private enterprise vs public-good-focused government service) are present at the same time in an organization (see Conrath-Hargreaves & Wüsteman, 2019). Hybrid organizations can be found in any sphere (e.g., for-profit commercial, not-for-profit private enterprise, public-private partnerships, public sector), and the amount of hybridity and axes along which organizations are hybrid can vary (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017; Vakkuri et al., 2021). Vakkuri and colleagues (2021) list four mechanisms that lead to hybridity in organizations:

- “Mixed ownership”
- “Goal incongruence and distinct institutional logics”
- “Multiplicity of funding arrangements”
- “Diverse forms of financial, social and professional control” (pp. 248–249)

The hybrid nature of HEOs worldwide has been well-documented (reviewed in Pekkola et al., 2020, 2021). HEOs frequently experience hybridity via all four of Vakkuri and colleagues’ (2021) mechanisms, at multiple hierarchical levels (Table 4.1; Pekkola et al., 2020 & 2021).

At the organizational level, HEO hybridity is often observed in the governance styles employed. HEO governance has historically been described as collegial or professional bureaucratic, with management decisions largely made collaboratively by the community of academics and staff making up the organization (e.g., Geschwind et al., 2019; Välimaa et al., 2024). However, HEO governance has been transitioning in both legislation and organizational practice in Finland (and elsewhere) to a New Public Management-influenced managerial

TABLE 4.1 Hybridity at HEOs is present at multiple hierarchical levels. Based on Pekkola et al. (2020, 2021)

Level	Hybridity experienced
Policy and funding	Varying policy environment, funding sources, and metrics
Organizational	Governance style, norms, variation between and within operational units
Workers and the positions they occupy	Positions may blend domains that operate with different logics; staff have a variety of personal logics

style, with decisions made in a top-down manner by appointed leaders (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018; Geschwind et al., 2019; Kallio et al., 2020; Pekkola et al., 2021; Universities Act, 2009; Välimaa et al., 2024). Organizational hybridity at HEOS is also caused by the variation in organizational and professional logics that can often be observed between and within the organizational units of an HEOS; the term “multiversity” describes this intraorganizational variation (Krücken & Torke, 2007). Hybridity at the organizational level can also be altered through mergers, which can, for example, increase organizational complexity, change governance mechanisms, and blend organizational cultures (Pinheiro et al., 2016).

Workers at HEOS experience hybridity in the positions they occupy, which frequently blend work roles that entail different logics, such as research and management. Additionally, workers’ own personal logics can vary widely. Given the wide variation in possible logics for the organization, workers’ personal logics may differ greatly from those of leadership; this potential divergence has implications for professional identity and well-being (Jayman et al., 2022; Samad et al., 2022; Siekkinen et al., 2020).

Given the prevalence of hybridity research at the policy and organizational level, Pekkola et al. (2021) called for hybridity studies that include work positions and workers. This study answers the call by focusing its data collection on individual workers in HEOS as well as including data at all hierarchical levels.

2.2 *Crisis Leadership*

Crisis management and leadership have been the subject of many recent reviews. Most of these reviews have focused on research outside of the educational context (e.g., Riggio & Newstead, 2023; Schaedler et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021), though one (Striepe & Cunningham, 2021) specifically explored educational leadership, albeit not in higher education contexts. My colleagues and I (Perkins et al., 2024) briefly reviewed higher education crisis leadership research from 2020 onwards, conducted panel discussions with Finnish higher education staff, and developed the following conception of crisis in higher education:

a crisis is broadly speaking something that blocks or otherwise interferes with an organization’s primary functions in such a way that usual routines and practices are no longer effective, and major negative outcomes may result if the crisis is not dealt with appropriately. A crisis may affect an entire organization or just a portion of the organization, and crises can vary along many different axes, such as scale, predictability, onset speed, duration, and cause. The impacts of any given crisis depend greatly on

context, with the potential for wide variation in the needs of different organizations, organizational units, leaders, and individuals, even simultaneously. (p. 45)

Reviews from both the educational and non-educational contexts have highlighted the importance of communication, sensemaking, adaptive leadership, collaboration, coordination, and changes in decision-making processes for successful crisis outcomes at organizations (Riggio & Newstead, 2023; Striepe & Cunningham, 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Communication during crisis has its own theory: situational crisis communication theory (Coombs & Tachkova, 2022). In the educational context, Striepe and Cunningham (2021) highlighted the importance of well-being in the organizational community and also brought attention to the lack of diversity in crises studied by education researchers. In the higher educational context, my colleagues and I (Perkins et al., 2024) found that crisis research during the COVID era focused on themes of well-being, leadership characteristics, and communication.

Existing crisis research has called upon a variety of frameworks and theories, though none of the reviews cited in the first paragraph mention hybridity theory or organizational logics as being used in crisis research. Riggio and Newstead (2023) summarize the relevance of crisis management theory, cognitive resource theory, charismatic leadership theory, and complexity leadership theory to crisis response, but conclude with a call for additional theorization work relating to crisis leadership and crisis management overall. Schaedler et al. (2022) identify that agency theory, managerial and organizational cognition, social evaluations, ethical leadership, and resource dependency theory were the primary theoretical lenses used in strategic crisis leadership research, again ending with recommendations that future research consider other theories. Wu et al. (2021) discuss the lack of focus on crisis leadership among leadership research and theorists, mentioning that while established theories such as contingency theory may address issues raised during crisis, they are not sufficient to explain crisis leadership.

2.3 *Linking Hybridity and Crisis Leadership*

Recognizing the hybrid status of HEOs helps highlight that crises in HEOs are not likely to be easily reducible events to study. The multilayered hybridity of HEOs interacts with crises to form a complex web of policy directives; societal, organizational, and personal logics; and crisis-created uncertainties. Leaders and others in the organization must navigate this web as they attempt to support the well-being of those undergoing crisis while simultaneously continuing operations in the most appropriate manner. But even such a statement as

“continuing operations” becomes complex in a hybrid organization. “Continuing operations” requires identifying which outputs should be produced by the organization during crisis, and which outputs are valued will depend greatly on the (competing) logics employed by those legislating, funding, evaluating, leading, staffing, and receiving services from the organization.

The management of crises in more-hybrid organizations such as HEOs thus has the potential to be different from that of their less-hybrid organizational cousins. Exploring the relationship between the hybrid nature of HEOs and their crisis leadership may help improve leadership in all types of (hybrid) organizations, as well as contribute to the currently incomplete theoretical basis for understanding crisis management.

2.4 *Terminology*

To clarify my use of the terms “leadership” and “management”: the term “crisis management” is used herein to refer to all aspects of the crisis response of an organization, including preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crises (as well as the name of the academic discipline that studies these topics). I use “leadership” in a broad manner as well, meaning, roughly, actions that influence others, with the recognition that acts of leadership within an organization are not limited to those with formal positions of power (Bass & Bass, 2008). “Crisis leadership” thus refers to the actions of those who influence others regarding elements of crisis management, actions that are often, but not exclusively, carried out by those with positions of power in organizations.

3 **Research Focus and Methods**

In this chapter I will explore how hybridity was observed to manifest within staff members’ experiences of Finnish HEO crisis management. Specifically, I will analyse the relationship between hybridity theory and crisis management to develop theoretical concepts that facilitate a better understanding of crisis management within (and hopefully beyond) the Finnish HEO context.

This research was conducted by carrying out thematic analyses on two datasets. The interview data consist of 13 individual interviews about leadership during COVID-19, conducted with 9 leaders at a single case-study Finnish university in 2022–2023 (14.5 hours of discussion; see Perkins (2023) for full details). The panel data consist of 10 panel discussions on the broad topic of crisis leadership, held with 25 total staff members from 14 different higher-education-related organizations within Finland in 2023 (23.75 hours of discussion; see Perkins et al. (2024) for full details). After the hybrid inductive and

deductive reflexive thematic analyses of each dataset were completed (Braun and Clarke, 2006), alignments (“links”) between the themes identified and hybridity theory were sought inductively by comparing the data-based crisis management themes with concepts present in existing hybridity research (see section 2.1 for core literature used). Tentative links between hybridity and crisis were further explored by iteratively reviewing the data, existing crisis management themes, and the overall set of links identified, repeating iterations until a final set of links was settled on.

To prevent identification of participants, quotations will only be cited as coming from either the panel discussions or the case study interviews. AI tools were not used in the research or writing process, with the sole exception of machine-learning-assisted transcriptions and translations of discussions, all of which were verified by fluent speakers.

4 Results and Discussion

This section discusses the three main areas where links between hybridity and crisis leadership were observed:

- Changing hybridity as a driver of crisis (4.1)
- Observed variation in hybridity during crisis, at both the policy level (4.2) and organizational level (4.3 and 4.4)
- Efforts to change the organization’s hybridity during crisis (4.4 and 4.5)

4.1 *Changing Hybridity as Driver of Crisis*

COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine were the two most frequently discussed crises in the interviews and panel discussions. However, when asked to list crises they had experienced or could foresee their organizations experiencing, panellists reported more than twenty examples of crises that my colleagues and I (Perkins et al., 2024) organized into eight different categories.

Organizational changes, such as funding cuts, under-resourced units, and mergers, were brought up as examples of crises by multiple panellists. Panellists shared that mergers required extended negotiations at all levels of the organization, with one panellist explaining why mergers were a crisis from their perspective:

I was thinking the same as [another panellist]. I have been in couple of universities where there has been huge changes and like organizational changes and they have been prolonged. And you, [the researcher], asked like what makes it a crisis. And I think that it might be something that

you don't know how to do your work, you don't know the rules anymore, you don't know what to do, with whom, and what you should do, and what are the expectations that you have for your tasks. So, you kind of lose all the tools that you have been working with.

These organizational crises all alter the hybridity of the organization. Organizational mergers in higher education cause changes that increase hybridity (e.g., Arbo & Bull, 2016), and changes in financial structures and available resources could either increase or decrease hybridity.

Hybridity theory may thus present a potential theoretical grounding for at least some crises: a change in the hybridity of an organization may be a cause of, or at least contribute to, crisis. It seems reasonable that both enhancements of hybridity (e.g., an organizational merger) and reductions in hybridity (e.g., loss of a funding source) could result in crisis.

This theoretical grounding of crisis via hybridity need not be restricted to the organizational crisis category identified in Perkins et al. (2024). Other types of crises my colleagues and I identified can be viewed as changing the social, organizational, and/or personal logics that underpin organizational functioning, thus altering the hybridity of the organization (e.g., violence and social upheaval, (social) media and the social environment). Whether this resulting altered organizational hybridity is a cause of crisis, an effect of crisis, or (more likely) some of both, is a topic for future studies to explore.

4.2 *Hybridity during Crisis: Policy Level*

Other than relatively small-scale international travel restrictions, the implementation of COVID restrictions at the case-study university coincided with wide-ranging restrictions enacted by the Finnish government. These national restrictions, implemented through a state of emergency declaration in mid-March 2020, included mandating the closure of non-early-childhood-education school buildings nationwide (Neuvonen, 2020). Thus, early in the pandemic the institution faced a relatively less-hybrid environment from a policy perspective. While decisions needed to be made about precisely how to implement the new national policy in the context of the organization's particulars, the national guidance was relatively unambiguous and had a singular clear aim: "to maintain the operational capacity of the healthcare system" (Neuvonen, 2020, p. 227).

However, hybridity quickly emerged at the policy level with subsequent national government actions, including even the May 2020 lifting of many of the March 2020 emergency restrictions (Government Communications

Department, 2020). For example, rapidly enacted funding provisions in 2020 for more student enrolment and additional research (Kivistö & Kohtamäki, 2022) occurred simultaneously with temporally- and spatially-variable restrictions on operational capabilities to maintain hospital capacity and calls for a focus on student/staff well-being (e.g., Government Communications Department, 2020; YLE News, 2021a; YLE News, 2021b). The conflicting demands of the university's societal obligation to minimize the spread of COVID along with the need to continue, and even increase, teaching and research operations was also explicitly recognized in the Rector's Council of Finnish Universities' COVID Scenario Group's May 2020 report (UNIFI, 2020). The government even described its own response as "hybrid" (Government Communications Department, 2020).

This "hybrid" government response led to challenges at the organizational level, especially where it led to overlapping, conflicting, and/or unclear regulatory situations, as one case study participant expressed:

But also it's very difficult to compare and it was different in different stages or phases of the COVID-19, but one thing is that it was not always clear between the different national, regional, and area levels at what is the current status of, for example, restrictions. And we also a couple of times put questions to them that okay is it you who is in charge of this situation now and sometimes we, if the situation was unclear, we made our own decisions as good as possible that so we didn't stop our actions but we went through and we took probably some risks as well.

Discussions of policy-level hybridity at the case study organization also occurred in relation to other subjects. These subjects included the national entrance examinations (i.e., the requirement to hold entrance exams but the inability to carry them out in-person in 2020 due to national health-related restrictions), coordination between universities (including discussions of variability between the universities in interpretation and implementation of policy), and that staff were frequently looking for clear guidance and policy at the organizational level (though those discussions could represent hybridity at the organizational level as well).

In summary, the amount of hybridity in the case study organization's operational and policy environment varied temporally throughout the crisis, sometimes quite rapidly. The discussions of policy-level hybridity by participants in both datasets support the idea that policy-level hybridity affected the organization and its crisis response.

4.3 *Hybridity during Crisis: Variation within the Organization*

The case-study university exhibited hybridity in its crisis response when setting organizational policy. Core decisions and policies made by upper management were posted as press releases on the campus's website, applicable to the entire university. Some lower-level leaders reported in interviews feeling that they simply had to wait for these instructions and implement them blindly. Deans and upper-level leaders, however, reported that these university-wide policies were created and worded with the specific intention of allowing inter- and intra-unit variation in implementation, which even extended down to the level of department in this leader's unit:

So there was some flexibility and some things that we needed to decide and needed to figure out by ourselves. And that was also very good because I think at the university level, the university is so large and diverse that there can't be very detailed instructions and things, but kind of an overall policies and overall guidelines should be there at the university level. So, something that I could as a dean base my decisions on, but that was then discussed at the faculty and we went down to the department level because departments are so different and then collected the ideas and creative guidelines of the faculty and then it was the department who eventually made the decisions, because the best knowledge of things how to get things organized in a reasonable way is at the department level. (case study participant)

The logics of each unit, including the particulars of each unit's prior operational characteristics, values, and norms, affected how that unit responded. For example, units varied in how regulations relating to distance and on-site work were interpreted. In one unit, the leader (and staff) reported focusing extensively on online staff community-building and coordination, including regular online meetings and newsletters. At the time of the case study interviews, that unit was reportedly still operating almost exclusively via remote working arrangements. Another unit leader reported focusing on in-person interactions to maintain unit cohesion and staff well-being during the crisis. This leader strove to build systems to allow staff to come to campus to work in COVID-safe ways in 2020, complete with copious tracking of individuals. This contrast was expressed by one case study participant when discussing the fall 2022 term:

And that was quite interesting because our people met all the time and we met online and we met face to face whenever possible. And we always had that kind of health safety first. But it was interesting then when we

really got back to campus that there were people that said “I haven’t seen anybody in two and a half years.” And our teachers or staff members would say “I didn’t see anybody for a week.”

Pekkola et al. (2021) observed that policies among three Nordic university systems were impacted by global trends, but that this convergence was modulated by the context of each country’s culture, resulting in variation between the studied countries. In this study I find that this concept of local-culture hybridity-related modulation of the larger policy environment extends down to the lower levels of the organization, with various organizational sub-units’ logics impacting the way that organizational policy decisions were implemented during COVID. This is thus a documented example of nested hybridity in an HEO, with the hybrid organizational structure strongly influencing the work of, and hybridity experienced by, individual staff. By acknowledging and accounting for this hybridity, university leadership allowed for more context-specific crisis responses by each individual unit.

4.4 *Hybridity during Crisis: Selective Hybridity in Decision Making*

While ultimate operational responsibility during COVID rested at the rectorate level, the rector’s decisions were nearly universally agreed upon by case study participants to have been strongly influenced by the discussions and recommendations made by a group I will call the “management team.” This management team consisted of the rector, vice rectors, and heads of all major organizational units (e.g., deans of faculties, heads of administrative services).

The use of this management team as the central node of information flow and decision making was a change from prior practices, which had historically distributed decision making out to various other groups. One case study participant said that the management team meetings pre-COVID largely entailed “sitting there and listening to the rector and other important people talk.” This change in decision-making structures aligns with prior research showing that crises tend to lead to more centralized control within organizations (Staw et al., 1981; Stoker et al., 2019), yet this group was not an example of a pure managerial (vs. collegial) archetype of centralized control.

Leaders reported gathering information relevant to decision making from their staff both via formal and informal mechanisms. Formal mechanisms most frequently entailed meetings with leadership teams that were immediately subordinate to the leader, e.g., a dean meeting with vice deans and possibly department chairs. Unit heads also reported that all-staff meetings of their units were used for information gathering, though less when time was of the essence.

Informal mechanisms of information gathering entailed personal contacts with individuals, frequently targeting contacts that the leaders thought would be most likely to be able to provide the needed information. These informal mechanisms were reported to be used at all levels of leadership, from the rector down to department chairs and lower-level groups. Informal mechanisms were frequently mixed with official channels as well, such as a formal meeting of the management team leading to informal information gathering at the lower levels.

I knew [that] there was a kind of a suggestion [for] the [management team] from this smaller group of people who prepared, there was already made a kind of a suggestion how do we do it. And then I had some time to discuss within our faculty. I shared the document with the vice deans and the heads of department, and they collected ideas from their closest professors and teachers of the department, and then we had a discussion before the meeting. (case study participant)

Thus, instead of decisions being made unilaterally in a top-down (managerial) manner, or solely in a collaborative community-driven (collegial) manner, data suggest that during COVID-19, in at least the observed units of the case study university, information was distributed rapidly down through leadership and personal networks, with decisions, input, and/or suggestions quickly gathered and then sent back up the networks to the representative who sat on the management team. It appears that at each node in this network, individuals took a dynamic approach to decision making and information sharing. If the information needed to be sent along or feedback gathered, committees and regularly-meeting groups were considered. In cases where time was of the essence, individual contacts were chosen based on how relevant their experience was to the decision that needed to be made. This resulted in what I term a “dendritic” or organic environmental sensing and decision-making system that was able to rapidly issue proposals, distribute those to the most relevant individuals, and collect feedback (including new proposals) from those individuals in a matter of minutes or hours, far faster than typical academic decision making occurs. The term “dendritic” is derived from biology, where, to oversimplify, dendritic cells process information and selectively pass it on to other cells in the immune system.

This decision-making system involved selective hybridity, as it entailed elements selected from both managerial (top-down) and collegial (community-driven, bottom-up) decision making. There were still clear hierarchies: the unit head was often the only one to receive proposals, and often the only one with

formal input into the managerial group discussions. However, the managerial group responsible for debating and influencing decisions was intentionally hybrid, including a variety of academic and administrative leadership, and decision making occurred through collaborative, community-driven input.

To conclude this section, the organization's information flow and decision-making system exhibited clear signs of hybridity (including some cases where hybridity appeared to have been intentionally selected). Feedback from the case study participants supports the contention that this rapidly-created selected-hybridity governance system was effective in facilitating a successful response to the crisis.

4.5 *Hybridity during Crisis: (Re)Negotiating Values in Crisis*

When leaders at the case study university were asked what guided their decision making during COVID-19, one topic emerged as predominant in the pre-Omicron phase of the crisis: avoiding the spread of COVID-19. While leaders talked about the need to continue education or research, these discussions, and the actions the leaders took, were nearly always framed in the context of changing their operations to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

This focus on avoiding the spread of COVID-19 was organizationally enforced through data-based metrics. Finland contact-traced the majority of COVID-19 infections during the pre-Omicron phase, and the university collected these tracking data from students and staff in near real time. Participants reported that the university started each management team meeting with a review of how many people were infected or quarantined in each operating unit. Deans and other unit leaders universally expressed a desire not to appear on that list, and in that context shared extensive descriptions of actions they took to counter the spread of COVID-19.

From a hybridity theory perspective, this reflects a rapid and dramatic shift in the negotiated values of the organization. Based on case study interviews, it appears that the organization's leadership rapidly agreed upon a single overriding value during the early days of COVID-19: to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This common value allowed individual leaders to interpret the structures in place and decisions by upper leadership according to their own beliefs and their own unit's needs, so the implementation of the overall university policies was able to be customized in each unit. This customization was generally not problematic due to the universally shared overriding value. Statements in the panel discussions aligned with this observation that organizational values initially became more unidimensional, with leaders expressing that a narrowing of focus allowed for clearer decision making and in some ways simpler leadership during COVID's initial phase.

Finland stopped infection-tracing activities once the Omicron variant of COVID-19 emerged and began spreading rapidly in the country (December, 2021). This resulted in the loss of the metrics used to quantify the COVID-prevention value, and discussions of leadership decision-making rationale post-Omicron at the case-study university did not show nearly as much alignment regarding values (with the centrality of the “do not cause infections” value being clearly lost).

The period of narrow organizational focus on a single overriding value coincides with the time in which Finland was a world leader in COVID prevention (i.e., pre-Omicron emergence), a time when the country experienced low excess-death and infection rates compared to many of its peers (Perkins, 2023; Pizzato et al., 2024). The period after Omicron’s emergence, when this common value was lost, coincides with a period when Finland became one of the worst-performing countries regarding COVID control, including having one of the highest excess death rates in all of Europe (Perkins, 2023; Pizzato et al., 2024).

There are many potential explanations for the temporal alignment of pandemic outcomes and organizational value renegotiation. However, this alignment, and the altered decision-making processes seen in section 4.4, does provide some support for the hypothesis that a temporary reduction in organizational hybridity via (re)negotiation of organizational logics could be a contributing factor to successful crisis outcomes. If this hypothesis is correct, attempts to reduce the hybridity of the organization, for example by having those in the organization collectively coalesce around one or a few central values, has the potential to facilitate enhanced outcomes during crises. And, conversely, enhancements of hybridity during crisis, such as the emergence of conflicting values, have the potential to lead to divergent practices and decisions during crisis, potentially leading to suboptimal outcomes.

5 Conclusions

Multiple links between hybridity theory and crisis management practices were observed in this study. Thus, hybridity theory shows potential as a theoretical framework that could provide explanatory power regarding elements of crisis management in organizations.

Based on these data, the relationship between hybridity and crisis may be summarized as: (1) changes in hybridity may cause crises, (2) crises may alter the hybridity of the organization (affecting the logics of the organizational environment, the organization, and/or the people in the organization), and (3) intentionally altering (especially reducing or selecting elements from) the hybridity of the organization in response to crisis may be a generalized strategy

for promoting positive outcomes from crises (Table 4.2). Additionally, there is potential for complicated interactions between the elements of these three relationships, with alterations in hybridity at one level or in one area impacting other elements, potentially even chaotically.

As the context of this work is limited (HEOs in one country over a period of only three years), verification of the validity, generalizability, and utility of these conclusions will require additional studies exploring a diversity of crises in multiple contexts using a variety of research methods. However, the prevalence of hybridity in organizations worldwide, and the similarity in challenges faced by hybrid organizations across the world, means it is probable that these findings are broadly relevant. Hybridity theory thus could provide a framework for understanding crisis management in a manner applicable across organizational and crisis contexts. Thus, further research into hybridity's interaction with crisis management is called for to develop a fuller understanding of the

TABLE 4.2 Summary of primary findings

Finding	Examples	Practitioner and policy implications
Changes in hybridity may cause crises	Changes in policy or funding environment; organizational mergers; changes in organizational, unit, staff, or societal logics ^a	Anticipate that policy, funding, organizational, and societal changes may cause crises; account for this in organizational planning and policy development.
Crises may alter the hybridity of the organization	Addition of new logics or changes to existing logics in the organization, its staff, and its operating environment	(Re-)Evaluate logics present during crisis, especially focusing on changes brought about by the crisis. Adjust leadership and policy accordingly.
Altering the hybridity of the organization in response to crisis may promote positive outcomes	Identifying and focusing on logics that promote positive crisis outcomes, such as collectively prioritizing certain values or altering decision making practices	Critically examine the existing logics present and identify areas where changes in logics (e.g., values, decision-making practices) may be feasible and potentially productive.

a Logics are “material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules” that explicitly or implicitly direct actions (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804).

theoretical underpinnings of, and practical implications of these underpinnings for, crisis management.

Hybridity theory may also explain some of the variability observed in crisis management at different types of organizations. For example, a switch to directive and/or centralized leadership during crisis has been observed in many organizations. Yet, in the case study organization, the move toward directive/centralized leadership was more moderate than in other organizations, with flexibility intentionally present in most decisions. Thus, might hybridity reduce the need for, or benefit of, directive/centralized leadership in crisis? Additionally, in hybrid organizations there is likely to be copious variability within staff and leader personal logics (e.g., ethics, values, cultural norms), and thus great potential for the emergence of logic conflicts at both the personal and organizational levels during times of crisis. Might hybridity thus be a potential explanatory factor for why educational crisis leadership (research) focuses more on well-being?

To briefly conclude, taking the hybridity of the organization into account while conducting crisis management is likely to be beneficial.

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Trial by Fire

Management during Crisis in Swedish Higher Education Institutions

Stefan Lundborg and Lars Geschwind

Abstract

Universities are intimately intertwined with their environments. They are subjects of a wide variety of expectations from external parties, and rely on meeting these expectations to maintain funding, trust and access to valuable infrastructure and information. Research has shown that universities are highly reactive to these pressures, both adapting to and attempting to influence their external realities. Part of this adaptation has taken the form of increasingly complex internal management structures, with growing management teams, new groups of support staff, and hybridisation of both roles and organisational principles.

This chapter examines what happens to these complex structures when put to the test by disruptive crises: Which interests, which actors and which values take priority – and what comes out on the other side? The theoretical approach is based on a combined lens of resource dependence theory and crisis management theory, applied to a material of 21 interviews at three different Swedish higher education institutions.

The results show a breakdown of established pathways during crisis conditions, where the complex structures aimed at anchoring, securing acceptance and reaching consensus are set aside in favour of speed, efficiency, and security – illustrating a disconnect between vision and implementation generated by the tension between fluid, hybrid conceptualisations and the binary system they appear in.

Keywords

higher education management – higher education administration – resource dependence theory – crisis management theory – hybridity

1 Introduction

Higher education institutions are intimately intertwined with their environments, and are subjects of a wide variety of expectations from external parties. Such parties include government actors, regional and local authorities, private enterprises, non-profit organisations, funding bodies, student and worker unions and the general public. The interests that these parties represent vary significantly and range from problem-solving related to competence provision and innovation to softer values along the lines of *Bildung* (Aarrevaara et al., 2021; Carvalho, 2021; Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Sørensen et al., 2019). To a significant extent, universities and colleges rely on meeting these expectations to maintain funding, trust, and access to valuable infrastructure and information. As a result, they have been demonstrated to be highly reactive to external pressures. Their reactions to these pressures have in turn been shown to be double-sided in that they can both constitute adaptation to external realities and active efforts to influence the way these realities are developed and implemented (Jernberg, 2017).

In order to manage this complex web of expectations from both their external environments and from internal interests, universities have established similarly complex internal governance structures (Schuster, 2010). Management teams have grown (Logue, 2013), new groups of professional support staff have emerged (Ryttberg, 2020), and the line between different internal roles have blurred through hybridisation processes (Pekkola et al., 2020). Hybrids in this context denote anything that combines aspects from two or more previously established categories, no longer being clearly identifiable as one or the other. All organisations are hybrid to some extent, but some are more hybrid than others (Hallonsten & Thomasson, 2023) – and there are many levels of hybridity in higher education institutions (Pekkola et al., 2022). Such hybridity may rest on contradictory values, giving rise to uneasy balances between different principles in the construction of internal roles and processes: e.g., autonomy and control, or quality and efficiency – in universities often represented by hierarchies and market incentives working within professionally anchored, loosely coupled systems (Noordegraaf, 2015).

The maintenance of this increasingly complex structure requires extensive internal communication networks and intricate decision-making processes that are in continuous flux and may as a result be untested in rough conditions. Although this growing complexity is globally occurring (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2024), the specific interactions of different components of the structure are bound to be highly dependent on the local, regional, and national context where they are situated: different political systems and cultures give

rise to different traditions, perspectives, regulatory conditions, expectations, and vocabularies that can cause different cases influenced by the same global patterns to manifest radically different characteristics (Schneider et al., 2014; van Schalkwyk & Cloete, 2024).

In the Swedish system, they are manifested by a tug-of-war between collegial and managerial modes of governance (Ahlbäck Öberg et al., 2016; Boberg, 2022), which is by no means a unique circumstance of Sweden in particular (Fischer, 2009; Leišytė & Gozlan, 2023; McGettigan, 2013; Newton, 2002; Želvys et al., 2021). It has, however, been placed front and centre of policy development as a subject of recurring government investigations (SOU 2008:104; SOU 2015:92; SOU 2019:6). The issue is also given unique characteristics through the distinctive Swedish dualistic system of government, where the question of “what to do” is separated from the question of “how to do it” (Andersson, 2004) – giving rise to a historical division between supreme authority over academic and administrative matters in Swedish universities (SOU 2015:92).

This division is no longer regulated by the government, but is echoed in a sector-wide agreement where the universities voluntarily divide all costs into “indirect” (administrative) or “direct” (academic) (Mattsson, 2011), making the distinction between these categories of activities an ever-present component of internal decision-making. The division of costs acts as a guide for internal funding arrangements, applications for external funding, as well as benchmarking efforts between different higher education institutions. This generates limitations on what funding is available for which purposes, competing perceptions of fairness in distribution, and an in-built division of all economic activity (and hence personnel costs) between academic and administrative (Mörtberg & Setterberg, 2024). The guidelines explicitly define different organisational units (e.g., “HR department”), processes (e.g., “student services”), roles (e.g., “IT-technician”) and – notably – leadership positions (e.g., “dean” and “research director”) as administrative, further determining how resources spent on these functions are allowed to flow through the system (SUHF, 2023). The overall distribution between direct (academic) and indirect (administrative) costs for each higher education institution is tracked internally and compared nationally each year – as illustrated by Figure 5.1, which provides an excerpt from an annual presentation of national ranking of higher education institutions by administrative costs.

The intricacies of the relationship between the academic and the administrative in the Swedish system are well-studied, but mostly in terms of their structural connections (Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2023), disconnects (Andersson et al., 2024), overlaps (Ryttberg, 2020), and gaps (Ekman et al., 2018). Likewise, the development over time has received significant scholarly attention

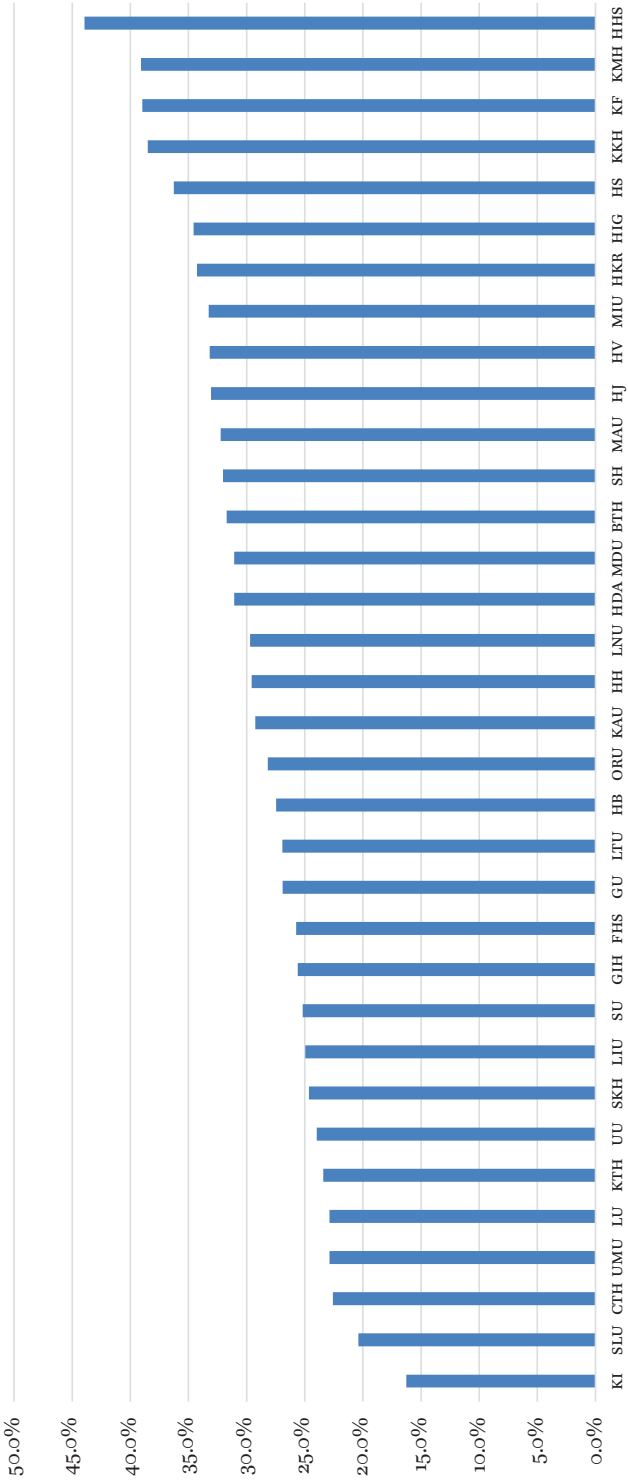


FIGURE 5.1 Budgeted indirect (administrative) costs at Swedish higher education institutions in 2024, as a proportion of total costs 2023 (Source: Mörtberg and Setterberg, 2024)

(Bauer et al., 1999; Bragesjö et al., 2012; Holmberg & Hallonsten, 2015; Östh Gustafsson, 2024) – but less has been said about what happens with this relationship when the slow march towards the future is disrupted by an upheaval of established conditions.

The covid-19 pandemic of 2020–2021 provides an interesting proving ground against this backdrop, where the strenuous demands of a rapidly evolving crisis may serve to show if the complex governance structures already straining under pressure in a state of relative sunshine can withstand a storm. Studies of covid-19 responses in higher education have frequently identified issues related to organisational preparedness and availability of necessary resources and infrastructure to maintain operations when faced with rapidly changing operational conditions (Bhagat & Kim, 2020; El Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020; Natow et al., 2022; Ross, 2020; Stracke et al., 2022; Wang & Sun, 2022). Some studies have indicated breakdowns of existing managerial structures and processes in the initial stages of the pandemic, giving way to temporary ad hoc procedures (Palumbo & Hill Duin, 2022; Pekkola et al., 2021), and highlighting the need for systems equipped to deal with unforeseen events (Tilak & Kumar, 2022). Others have pointed to reliance on authoritative guidelines and “data-driven” approaches to outline clear and universal paths forward at the institutional level (O’Shea et al., 2022).

In March 2020, the government of Sweden recommended all higher education institutions to close their campuses to students and switch to digital education (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2020). As most higher education institutions in the country are public authorities, this recommendation can in practice be interpreted as an instruction. During the rest of the spring semester, several large investments in expansion of higher education were introduced in an effort to halt the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic and its management efforts (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020), and a national coordinator was appointed for the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test (Dir. 2020:92) – a nationally standardised test for selection of students for admission to higher education, normally carried out under relatively autonomous conditions by the higher education institutions. Practical circumstances – such as the move to distance education, increased sick-leave, difficulties in maintaining partnerships and external funding during a steep economic crisis – thus echoed global patterns of disruption. Simultaneously, a system of governance rooted in unsettled tensions was made all the more precarious by sudden government mandates, and the uneasy balance in higher education management was set for a trial by fire.

Although the pandemic represents a period of sudden disruption, it can also be expected to bring long-term effects that go far beyond the scope of immediate crisis management (UNESCO IESALC, 2020; Welch, 2022). Higher education institutions find themselves in a challenging position having to

consolidate both short-term and long-term transformation processes with each other (Arday, 2022). Ongoing processes of organisational transformation have resulted in an uneasy balance between managerial and collegial modes of governance at higher education institutions (Marini & Reale, 2016; Sahlin, 2012; Tight, 2014), although sometimes with misgivings about precisely where the balance has been struck (Johnson, 2006; Prawelska-Skrzypek, 2020; Želvys et al., 2021). With Swedish higher education facing an unprecedented, fast-moving crisis in the midst of an ongoing and unsettled process of fundamental transformation of governance norms, the aim of this chapter is to contribute to the understanding of how the complex hybridisation processes of university management systems are affected by disruptive change. The question thus posed to university governance is this: When push comes to shove, what structures endure, what values are prioritised, and what comes out on the other side?

In answering this question, the next section of this chapter will outline a theoretical approach resting on a fundamental resource dependence perspective anchored in an empirical lens of crisis management theory, followed by a description of the empirical data supporting the chapter and the methodological approach. The chapter then presents the results of the analysis, and finally concludes by considering the implications of these results in a concluding discussion.

2 Theoretical Approach

This paper adopts a resource dependence perspective (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003), viewing organisations as coalitions of interest groups interacting with each other and their environments through the exchange of resources. Neither organisations nor interest groups are necessarily static or easily defined. Most actors have multiple different interests that are not all shared with the same group, meaning that their group affiliations can shift depending on context. Actors and resources hence flow back and forth between the “inside” and the “outside” of the organisation, forming an open system.

The resources that flow are not limited to money, but can include equipment, time, information, legitimacy, or anything else that an interest group could require or provide (Biermann & Harsch, 2017). The differing access to and need for various types of resources makes groups dependent on each other, which is reflected in the structure of the organisation. Asymmetrical dependencies, where one group needs another more than the inverse, breed control over the organisation’s processes, which in turn breeds control over its structures, which in turn breeds control over its actions (Johnson, 1995).

This control is, however, not direct, so the relationship between who controls the important resources and who governs the actions of the organisation

is not perfect – it is essentially part of a loosely coupled system (Weick, 1976). One significant reason is that any given organisation will depend on multiple resources that are seldom all in the control of a single interest group, and the dependencies are also often reciprocal – introducing strong elements of negotiation, compromise and competition that dampen the influence of each party (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Each process where such dampeners are activated provides a filter that dilutes and redirects the original intent. Dependencies determine the distribution of power, which determines managerial selection and authority, which determines the formation of formal structure and decision-making. Each step is reciprocal and non-linear in such a way that the steps all affect and are affected by each other – in other words, inherently hybridised in relation to each other.

Managerial action plays a key role in this process. It is aimed at securing the resources that the organisation needs by responding to or influencing pressures from the environment or various internal interest groups (Aldrich, 1976). This action generates structures that balance different demands against each other, and means that the way an organisation functions at a given time is the result of a precarious balancing act based on known information. The measure of success for the results of this balancing act is how well it deals with uncertainties (Davis & Cobb, 2010).

In this case, such uncertainties can be represented by crises, as understood by crisis management literature. Crises suddenly disrupt normal operations and threaten the resources of an institution (Zdziarski, 2006), meaning that they change both the availability and the desirability of various resources. This also brings changes in the nature of internal as well as external interdependencies: who needs what from whom, and who can provide what to whom. Because of this, crises risk upending the delicate balancing act between interest groups, who suddenly find their interests and dependencies temporarily or permanently altered. The status quo is thus called into question, and existing structures are tested based on whether they are capable of maintaining balance even under different conditions than those that spawned them.

Jaques (2007) outlines four overarching clusters of components of a crisis management process, consisting of (1) crisis preparedness, which is aimed at creating robust structures that can survive disruption; (2) crisis prevention, which consists of identifying approaching crises through risk management and monitoring; (3) crisis incident management, where realised crises are recognised and managed; and (4) post-crisis management, where recovery and evaluation take place.

The relationship between these four clusters is not necessarily sequential: they may overlap and build upon each other, as e.g., even management

of ongoing crisis incidents requires some simultaneous crisis preparedness or crisis prevention to avoid domino effects where one crisis gives rise to another. Similarly, post-crisis management is intimately intertwined with crisis preparedness in that this management process must consider how the organisation becomes equipped to deal with future crises. The relational crisis management model presented by Jaques thus represents a hybridity of temporal perspectives in its overlaps and flows between different clusters.

Viewed through a lens of resource dependence theory, each of the clusters of activities represent deals that are struck between interest groups in order to safeguard their stable access to required resources.

Crisis preparedness represents the long-term structuring of interdependencies: the balance struck between different interest groups in their pursuit for resources.

Crisis prevention denotes activities that manage uncertainties and thus secure availability of resources even in case of approaching changes in the environment.



FIGURE 5.2 A resource dependent crisis management relational model, adapted from Jaques (2007)

Crisis incident management represents short-term renegotiation of priorities and balances in the face of rapidly transforming conditions – testing the structure and departing from it when it is insufficient.

Post-crisis management finally represents the consolidation of renegotiated balances with prior structures into a new status quo, finding a new equilibrium that takes into account permanently changed conditions from the crisis.

This interpretation of crisis management can provide information about how disruptive crises affect the negotiated balance between interest groups, how different dependencies are weighed against each other, and what parts of the crisis management process drive which types of changes.

3 Methods and Materials

The study is based on 21 interviews with senior academic and administrative management as well as members of strategic councils – permanent bodies tasked with governing a particular area of strategic importance for the university, or advising senior management on their governance (Lundborg & Geschwind, 2023) – at three Swedish universities, carried out during the spring of 2021.

The universities were selected due to their different structural characteristics in terms of size and disciplinary width in order to see if the way the processes are discussed by the interviewees is influenced by the complexity and traditions of the university. Hence one university was chosen from each of the classic Swedish groups of comprehensive universities, specialised universities, and new universities. The first category represents large and disciplinarily wide universities, the second group comprises large and disciplinarily narrow universities and the third group represents small and disciplinarily wide universities. Small and disciplinarily narrow universities are generally not found in Sweden, as that combination of traits is mostly present at university colleges (Lundborg & Geschwind, 2021).

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, encompassing open questions about the way their respective university is governed, how strategic issues are normally resolved, and how the crisis management of the pandemic response was structured. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour each, were recorded and then transcribed verbatim in preparation for analysis. The interviews and analysis were conducted in Swedish, and illustrative quotations were then translated into English. During translation, lexical equivalence was sought when possible. In cases where lexical equivalence could not be achieved, such as with idioms, conceptual equivalence was sought instead. Minor omissions of identifying words were also incorporated

into the quotes to preserve anonymity. To decrease the potential effects of the additional layer of interpretation brought by the translation process, one author acted as the translator while the other acted as a reviewer to enable a semi-independent control of accuracy.

The transcribed interviews were coded in the qualitative analysis software NVivo through a data-driven thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2021), where topic summaries for the responses were defined and grouped in relation to their perspectives on long-term strategic processes, short-term crisis management, and the transition between one and the other. The resulting code distribution was then cross-referenced with structural information concerning the interviewees such as their university and role, in order to facilitate comparisons and detect salient connections between responses, and further processed into themes based on the analytical model defined in the theoretical framework.

TABLE 5.1 Distribution of roles and positions among interviewees

Type of institution	Council member	Role
Comprehensive university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Comprehensive university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Comprehensive university	Yes	Senior administrative manager
Comprehensive university	No	Senior administrative manager
Comprehensive university	Yes	Senior academic manager
New university	No	Senior administrative manager
New university	Yes	Senior academic manager
New university	Yes	Administrative Officer
New university	Yes	Administrative Officer
New university	No	Senior academic manager
New university	Yes	Academic staff
New university	Yes	Senior academic manager
New university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Specialised university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Specialised university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Specialised university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Specialised university	No	Senior administrative manager
Specialised university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Specialised university	Yes	Senior academic manager
Specialised university	Yes	Administrative Officer
Specialised university	Yes	Administrative Officer

4 Results

The descriptions of how decision-making processes were structured in relation to their circumstances were more or less uniform between the three universities. The following three quotes, one from each university, serve as illustrations of how long-term processes such as strategy formulation, representing the structuring of interdependencies providing crisis preparedness, are described:

We have a very collegial process when it comes to the strategy. [...] We are going to formulate a renewed strategy, and we will form a new group of teachers and researchers [who will work on it], with the vice chancellor or pro-vice chancellor as the chairperson. And the head of university administration will also participate this time, I think.

– SENIOR ACADEMIC MANAGER, new university

The deans are really important players [in strategic issues]. They are in this mid-way position where they have links both upwards or whatever you should call it, towards the vice chancellor and the rest of the university management, and then of course within their own organisation. So they are some sort of core ... Or well, very important people anyway that you can't skip in these processes. Then of course the vice chancellor and their deputy vice chancellors run the processes.

– SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, specialised university

In [the council], where you mostly have the deans, you can discuss more general policy and strategy issues. And determine that 'this is the way we will act as a university'. And then the dean takes this home to their faculty and makes sure they move in that direction. Or actually, it's more like they discuss and reach a consensus, and then the faculties start acting in a similar manner in different types of issues.

– SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, comprehensive university

Notable in all three cases is that the focus lies clearly with the operational core and the academic management, whereas the head of administration was mentioned in only one of the cases, and then as a possible new addition rather than as an integral part of the process. This focus provides a sharp contrast to the way that short-term crisis incident management in relation to the pandemic was handled, as illustrated by the following quotes from each of the three universities:

The crisis management group was led by the head of administration and staffed by key staff within the university administration, mostly legal

officers. So a lot of [the decisions] made during the spring and fall were sort of processed in this crisis management group, where legal officers had the final word when it came to what we could and couldn't do. And of course, there were also people from the communications department, because a lot of this is ... [pause] to lead in these situations is really just to communicate. So it was a good team.

– SENIOR ACADEMIC MANAGER, comprehensive university

We had a group we called the crisis management. And that consisted of [the vice chancellor], the chief security officer, the communications director, the chairman of the students' union and then a number of people who were needed depending on what crisis was on the table. In this case the HR-director and the chairman of the board of education.

– SENIOR ACADEMIC MANAGER, specialised university

The head of administration has been responsible for the coordination of the entire pandemic ... All of the covid-related issues.

– SENIOR ACADEMIC MANAGER, new university

Pandemic management at all three universities revolved around a central crisis management group either formed for this purpose or adapted from an existing crisis management group. The focus in their staffing was clearly on senior university management and administrative officers, whereas the academic personnel take a toned-down role, if represented at all – essentially the reverse of how processes of strategy formulation were described. The first quote in particular illustrates how the power over decision-making within the university was shifted towards administrative management and staff, giving legal officers key influence when it comes to what was decided and communication officers key influence when it comes to how the decisions were spread through the organisation. These are two groups of personnel never mentioned at all in relation to the long-term strategic processes.

There are several potential explanations for this difference in distribution of power between the different types of processes. One such explanation would be that different situations call for different competences, and this explanation gathers some support from the interviews:

It was so incredibly quick, so sometimes you just had no time. You just had to inform everyone after the fact. And then you had to be extra careful of course and put your ear to the ground so they didn't react negatively. That never happened, instead they were just grateful that someone sort of took the reins. Because by making a decision you also take the

blame if something goes wrong. And at the faculties and further down, they are so scared to do something wrong at the institution level and the subject level. So they would rather do nothing at all. And then it's often easier that you make a decision a bit higher up and then you sort of take the blame, so to speak.

– SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, comprehensive university

This quote illustrates a feeling of insecurity among academic managers below the university level when it comes to managing uncertainties as part of crisis prevention, where academics are much less certain about what can be done and needs to be done here and now than they are regarding what the university should be doing on a more principal level in a more distant future. This discrepancy ties in with two ideas: (1) that the crisis management has a correct course of action and wrong courses of action, and (2) that the short-term actions taken here and now will not feed into what long-term actions will be possible later, as illustrated by the following two quotes:

It's pretty interesting, actually, when the pandemic hit ... It's amazing, adult people, experienced leaders, sitting and screaming for a decision so that they know what they should do. That they don't realise that we can't say what happens tomorrow.

– SENIOR ACADEMIC MANAGER, comprehensive university

Most of what we've gotten now are temporary reinforcements. And that doesn't really affect our planning, but becomes more of a pressure on the faculties to deliver as well as they can on what they're already doing.

– SENIOR ACADEMIC MANAGER, new university

The demands for clear decisions also generate a greater sense of unity and consensus than what is perhaps the norm in academic circles – if there is only one correct course of action, and the focus is on implementing it as efficiently as possible, there is no need to come into conflict about what is to be done:

You don't have time to start any new programmes, so you just throw more onto what is already there, really, and scale up a little. So no, there hasn't been much of a discussion. There hasn't been any criticism either, instead you just ... [Pause] It's more that now we try to do as well as we can based on these circumstances, and help each other. So there is one faculty that has managed this better than the others in relation to their size [...] that has had quite a lot of digital education since before, and has been able

to take on a lot of [the government investments in expanded education]. And it has been accepted, there has never been any discussion when it comes to this.

– SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, comprehensive university

The quote above describes how the internal distribution of new government funding has been something of a non-issue when it comes to pandemic investments, which contrasts sharply with how the consolidation of the new status quo in post-crisis management processes are described at the same university:

The tension that remains and that I don't think we'll ever really get away from, it concerns these wet and dry faculties. The ones with a lot of education funding and the ones with a lot of research funding, particularly external research funding. And the ones with weak price tags and the ones with strong price tags. [...] They are experts at writing long, long memos explaining why they should get the money.

– SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, comprehensive university

The lack of debate when it comes to pandemic responses also contrasts with how non-monetary aspects of the normal planning process works at the universities, which are described as heavily laden with the weighing of different perspectives against each other, as illustrated by the following quote regarding strategy formulation:

So then we used these councils and boards and groupings so that each got to have a look at these texts for the strategy from their perspective, then provide feedback. So when we had the final strategy and decided on it, it had been shown everywhere and viewed from a lot of different perspectives.

– SENIOR ACADEMIC MANAGER, specialised university

Another angle that could explain the difference between the short-term crisis management and long-term strategic planning, apart from the perceptions of ambiguity regarding available courses of action, is that the circumstances simply do not permit the universities to maintain the processes that they would like to:

It went straight to the management. From administrative officer to management, you could say. That is if it was a great hurry. So then you don't always have time to run it through these groupings, actually. They don't

convene that often, really. So then you are sort of forced to cut to a shorter path in order to reach a decision.

– SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, new university

So what we were trying to do was really just to ... [Pause] I guess we didn't really make any conscious decisions when it comes to [the processes], instead we really just tried to make it happen. And what happens then, I think, is that you skip these parts of the process that are about anchoring within the organisation, that the questions should be discussed widely, the processes that you are used to. [...] Ordinarily the processes would have been longer and more thought-through in different ways.

– SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, specialised university

These quotes illustrate some sort of order of priority when it comes to different aspects of a decision-making process: the key thing is to reach a course of action, and precisely what course of action it is and how it was determined becomes secondary. These secondary characteristics would have been nice to have, but are deemed expendable when push comes to shove. Sometimes this order of priority is taken one step further, when it would have been possible to follow ordinary processes, but the universities choose not to do so in order to allow busy people to focus on other issues deemed more pressing, as illustrated by the following two quotes:

I had a meeting with [the chairperson] of a virus centre at the university, and you can imagine what their situation has been like during the last year. So of course, you don't sit down with them and discuss non-essential issues.

– ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, comprehensive university

Well, [the pandemic] has affected a lot, but it has really been an indirect effect in that ... well, everyone has been a little too overloaded. And then we have some parts of the university that do clinical work. Nursing, dentistry, and such. They have carried an insanely heavy load so that means that we have simply had to pause certain things.

– ACADEMIC MANAGER, new university

Although some of the differences between normal operations and crisis operations can be explained by the increased pressure as above, some of the differences can also be illustrated by a notable lack of pressure at the sort of strategic councils that would normally be involved in high-stakes decision-making:

We have ended up in a completely new situation, but I don't really see any effects anywhere, especially not for the council. [...] I don't think we have had a single item on the agenda that ties in with the pandemic. [...] It is sort of business as usual, I think you might say.

– ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, specialised university

Upon direct questions about whether the pandemic has affected the selection of items entered into the agenda at the strategic councils, all secretaries interviewed replied with more or less firm negatives.

5 Concluding Discussion

The goal when structuring a process or organisation is to build something robust enough to last through not only the good times, but also the bad. It is somewhat clear that while the decision-making processes at the universities studied might have such robustness, it would only be because they are temporarily put aside during times of crisis to be reinstated when the all-clear has been signalled. In terms of crisis preparedness, the structures seem insufficient, echoing previous findings regarding the breakdown of established structures in the face of disruptive changes (Pekkola et al., 2021; Palumbo & Hill Duin, 2022), as well as findings regarding Swedish crisis management structures in other sectors, which point towards a prevalence of ad hoc solutions with tenuous connections to non-crisis management structures (Engberg & Wimelius, 2015).

There is a clear difference in the distribution of organisational power in the studied universities when it comes to long-term planning and short-term crisis management, with the pandemic having shifted authority and influence clearly towards administrators while side-lining both collegial and managerial functions within the academic parts of the organisation. This side-lining is, however, not forced upon the side-lined academics – to a certain extent it instead seems to be demanded. This illustrates a previously identified administrative-frontline divide in the internal approach to higher education crisis management (Myer et al., 2011).

The divide is tied to a difference in how the realities of decision-making are perceived in each respective type of scenario. Long-term strategic planning is viewed through a lens of conflicting perspectives and interests, and resolved through the airing of these conflicts and negotiation of their solutions. Short-term crisis management is instead viewed as the handling of an objective reality where there is a right course of action and a multitude of wrong ones – and no one wants to be the one that accidentally picks one of the wrong options.

This perspective causes the universities to fall back on the stable competences of administrators in order to determine what is right and what is wrong, what needs to be done now and what can wait. When the waiting is done, the administrators are expected to step back and let the academics determine where to go next. This order of things also carries with it the idea that administrators are somehow more neutral and objective than academics, but also more devoid of vision. The more open the horizon, the more the academics are perceived as needed to show us all the different paths we can take and determine which one would best serve the collegium as a whole. The more closed the horizon, the more the administrators are perceived as needed to guide us along the razor-thin line between right and wrong, to make sure no one steps out of line and falls down into the abyss.

The specific division of labour between academics and administrators may be an artifact of the likewise specific context of Swedish higher education. This context includes a heritage from a dualistic system of government and an in-built categorisation of all functions as administrative or academic in nature – entrenching a mindset where the two are opposites in a binary system, and notably defining leadership functions even within the conventional academic sphere as administrative overhead (making management a nominally administrative task). Importantly, however, the study illustrates that there are different sets of labours to be divided – and that this division may generate significant disconnects in the overall management system.

In terms of the crisis management framework, a cycle can be identified in the studied universities where crisis preparedness – constructing the fundamental mechanisms of how the organisation works – falls under the purview of academics. Crisis prevention and crisis incident management, dealing with the nuts and bolts of making sure the system works under pressure, is left to the administrators. When all is said and done, the academics return to take the reins of post-crisis management. This might serve to explain the structural breakdowns identified both here and in previous studies: It is here that the role division generates a disconnect between the framework of the system and its application. Mechanisms are designed and applied respectively by different people acting under different conditions according to different perspectives – a combination of crisis management traits termed by Myer et al. (2011) as compartmentalisation, where different functions act independently of one another, and limited focus, where the planning process fails to consider the whole scope of consequences.

In terms of resource dependence theory, crises like the covid-19 pandemic upend the delicate balance between interest groups established through crisis

preparedness mechanisms, and when crisis prevention mechanisms are insufficient it thrusts the organisation into a new phase of renegotiation in crisis incident management. Post-crisis management then serves as a process of translation between the renegotiated balance and the status quo. Because both crisis prevention and crisis incident management are perceived as short-term technical and administrative issues, where academics have little interest (as in the case of crisis prevention) and little confidence (as in the case of crisis incident management), administrators have comparatively strong control over the processes that generate adjustments to the status quo.

This observation coincides well with previous observations of structural movement towards line management as opposed to collegial governance mechanisms (Trowler, 2010; Göransson, 2011; Davis et al., 2016; Želvys et al., 2021; Boberg, 2022), stronger emphasis on administrative concerns and the growth of audit systems in higher education (Kehm, 2006; Kristensen et al., 2011; Sahlin, 2012; Wheeldon et al., 2022) and the entry of administrators into traditionally academic domains (Whitchurch, 2008; Rytberg, 2020). It also mirrors fundamental understandings of implementation and policy research, where the visions and decisions do not necessarily translate easily into what eventually happens in practice (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Colebatch, 2006).

There are multiple hybridisation processes at play that might serve to explain why such structural movements happen. Issues of long-term strategic planning are conceptualised as distinct from issues of short-term crisis management, but in practice the same issue can be moved more or less seamlessly between the boxes depending on the specific circumstances, the perspective applied, and the priorities championed. And so, an issue that seemed like it was clear-cut strategic in nature before the crisis turns into something rather more operative when time is limited. Managers are conceptualised as dominant over support staff, but in times of crisis it suddenly becomes much less clear whose word is law. What is academic and what is administrative is codified in the very backbone of financial accounting and organisational structure, but becomes much more mutable in practice when the boat begins to rock.

The increasingly blurred lines between academics and administrators (Rytberg, 2020) are accompanied by similarly blurred lines between the academic and the administrative, in that fundamentally similar issues can gravitate towards one end or the other of the spectrum depending on how they are framed. Simultaneously, the labels themselves appear to remain intact, safeguarded by the dualistic heritage of Swedish government as well as the sector-wide economic framework dividing costs into precisely these two categories.

With a mutable practice and an immutable categorisation, the only way for the framework to adapt to changing organisational realities is to nudge the line between the categories piecemeal in one direction or the other. Decisions regarding the nuts and bolts of the system have far-reaching effects for the basic functionality of the machine as a whole. Because of this, every time a bolt is placed or replaced, the overall functionality is nudged ever so slightly in the preferred direction of the one doing the placement. This is not necessarily an intentional process, but the lack of intention itself would only serve to exacerbate the disconnect between vision and reality, since there would be no mechanism in place to ensure their continued overlap.

The implication for policy practitioners seems to be that a key to minimising the effects of uncertainties is to stress the relational component of their crisis management models – strengthening the connections between components and avoiding compartmentalisation of different stages of the process, to make it clear what choices are being made and what implications they have for the future. In practice, such measures could be taken in relation to all four clusters of the crisis management process. For crisis preparedness, procedural safety valves could be incorporated into existing governance structures, detailing which alternate paths should be taken to safeguard important values in case the ordinary process proves impossible to maintain. For crisis prevention, systematic bidirectional links could be established between permanent crisis management teams and strategic actors within the university, ensuring knowledge transfer and continuity in transitions from “business-as-usual” to crisis and vice versa. For crisis incident management, measures could be taken to ensure representative and balanced staffing of crisis management teams so that perspectives from different parts of the organisation can be taken into account even if the ordinary pathways have to be momentarily sidelined. For post-crisis management, decisions taken outside of normal procedures could be logged and later reviewed in order to generate overviews of long-term effects to be supported or countered.

Although this particular case shows a division of labour between the administrative and the academic, the more general implication lies in the disconnect between different crisis management activities that causes labour to be divided in the first place. For Swedish higher education specifically, further research into the relationship between the academic and the administrative as domains rather than actors might serve to generate an understanding of how such avoidance might be achieved. For other contexts, similar studies taking aim at other sectors or countries might serve to generate further insights into the effects of contextual factors for how the chips fall in terms of effects of crises on the internal distribution of labour and influence.

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From Remote to Hybrid Work

Managing New Forms of Work in Higher Education Institutions Post-COVID-19

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly transformed work practices in higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide, shifting from onsite to remote and subsequently hybrid work patterns. This chapter analyses the adaptation of Finnish universities' managerial and academic staff to these changes. Utilising Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory, the study analyses the open-ended questions of three rounds of surveys conducted among top and mid-managerial staff in 2020, 2021, and 2022, and a 2023 survey of academic staff. The findings reveal that the transition to remote work was initially perceived as challenging but was managed efficiently, with digital tools and remote work practices quickly adopted. After the initial lockdown hybrid work, combining remote and onsite activities, emerged as the new norm, offering flexibility and efficiency but also presenting challenges such as maintaining work-life balance and a sense of community. Managers' and academic staff's perceptions highlight the benefits of hybrid work, including time saved in commuting and enhanced international collaboration, while addressing the complexities of managing hybrid work environments. The study underscores the resilience and adaptability of Finnish HEIs, emphasising the importance of self-organisation and the role trust and a low hierarchy play in facilitating these transitions. The chapter contributes to the understanding of hybrid work as a form of organisational resilience, providing insights into evolving HEI post-pandemic work practices.

Keywords

hybridity in work practices – higher education institutions – Finland – Covid-19

1 Introduction

In 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic caused the worldwide closure of public and private organisations, leading to an increase in remote and hybrid work. There was a global shift from 'onsite' work to full- or part-time remote work, from 31 per cent before the pandemic to 51 per cent during it (Strack et al., 2021). However, these percentages varied between higher- and lower-income countries and between professions (Sostero et al., 2020), with professionals working more often from home receiving higher salaries (Dingel & Neiman, 2020).

In the education sector most countries closed their education institutions at all levels, from kindergartens to higher education institutions (hereafter HEIs), by the end of April 2020 (UNESCO, 2021), and both students and teachers had to adapt quickly to using digital platforms to continue teaching and learning (Kundu & Bej, 2021). These closures greatly affected students, teachers, and institutions' managerial staff (Pekkola et al., 2021). Unexpected new challenges emerged due to the need to rapidly accommodate remote work and e-teaching practices. These changes required staff, managers, and students to cope with the sudden need to learn how to use and rely on digital technologies. At HEIs in the early stages these changes caused some nervousness about skills regarding aspects such as the use of ICT tools for teaching and learning (Pekkola et al., 2023). The changes therefore demanded rapid self-organisation and adaptation from students and teachers (Kundu & Bej, 2021), as well as administrative and management staff.

Much research has been undertaken since the spring of 2020 into the short- and long-term negative, and some positive, impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on societies worldwide, including in the education sector (see Tang, 2022 for a review). For example, this body of research has focused on the challenges and opportunities the digitalisation of education due to the pandemic brought to HEI teachers and students (e.g., Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Toquero, 2020), the multifaceted response of HEIs to the emergence of Covid-19 (e.g., Quattrone et al., 2020; Izumi et al., 2020), students' and teachers' readiness for e-learning and teaching (e.g., Kundu & Bej, 2021; Chaudhary, 2020), and the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on students' personal and academic lives (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Research has also analysed management practices in HEIs during and since the Covid-19 lockdowns, focusing on challenges and concerns related to the transition to distance learning, organisational, educational, technological, sociopsychological, and financial support, and in the development of anti-crisis management (e.g., Nenko et al., 2021), academics' resilience during the pandemic (e.g., Reyes et al., 2022), university presidents' and other management staff's roles and perceptions regarding

Covid-19 change requirements in work practices (e.g., McNaughtan et al., 2023, Pekkola et al., 2021), and the tensions and inequalities of flexible work in university contexts (e.g., Smyth et al., 2021).

At the time of writing four years have passed since the first lockdown. Currently, working at least partly remotely is often seen as the 'new normal', and it seems onsite in-person forms of work, teaching, and study will never entirely return. The study this chapter presents is part of a series of analyses focusing on understanding how managers dealt with the changes Covid-19 caused in Finnish universities. In this study we analyse three rounds of surveys of top and mid-managerial Finnish university staff (springs of 2020, 2021, 2022). The 2020 survey's findings can be found in Pekkola et al. (2021), and the 2021 survey's findings are presented in Pekkola et al. (2023).

In this paper we delve into the analysis of the 2022 survey, cross-analyse these findings with those of the previous two surveys, and focus on understanding: (i) *how managerial perspectives adapted to the new environment during the three-year pandemic*; and (ii) *how these managers understood the combination of remote and onsite work – hereafter, hybrid work – as a self-organising strategy* given its implications for their work, as well as the dynamics between co-workers. To gain a more comprehensive picture, we also utilise data from a survey applied to academic staff at Finnish university education faculties in the late spring of 2023. By utilising these two data sources, we (iii) *compare manager and staff perspectives on this adaptation and self-organisation of work practices*, with the objective of identifying common and divergent understandings of current hybrid work practices in Finnish HEIs. By hybrid work, we mean work practices that emerge 'between the pure types' – that is, non-remote and remote work (Stasiła-Sieradzka, Sanecka, & Turska, 2023).

Our chapter contributes to academic research in the field of crisis management and hybridity in higher education by analysing the perceptions of Finnish university managerial and academic staff, known as highly autonomous teaching environments, of the changes in work practices due to Covid-19 from in-person to remote, and more recently, from remote to hybrid. We consider that the high levels of trust and low hierarchy in Finnish universities provide an excellent laboratory for studying the self-organising of work.

For our analytical framework we utilise Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) (e.g., Gell-Mann, 1994; Holland, 1996). CAS is applied as a lens for understanding how decentralised, adaptive, and evolving systems like Finnish HEIs behave. The study of CAS helps in understanding the self-organisation mechanisms and adaptability of academic work in dynamic environments as examples of systems that can thrive in conditions of complexity and change. Empirically, we perform a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014) of the surveys' open-ended questions.

2 Theoretical Backdrop to Analyse Adaptation and Self-Organisation in Work Practices

2.1 *Contextualising the Investigated Phenomenon*

This paper focuses on analysing work practices in HEIS, from in-person to remote and then hybrid, caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

The term hybridity is variously defined and is often considered an ambiguous and multidimensional concept (Pekkola et al., 2021). In this chapter we start with the general definition of hybridity derived from the natural sciences, which authors such as Johanson and Vakkuri (2018, p. 1) present as ‘an impure existence in between pure types’, but highlight that the increased complexity and diversity of social contexts in social systems lead to a rarity of pure types and a variety of fluid forms of hybridity where different and even opposing logics and values often meet and mix (Pekkola et al., 2022). By hybrid work arrangements we therefore mean work practices that emerge ‘between the pure types’ – that is, non-remote and remote work (Stasiła-Sieradzka, Sanecka, & Turska, 2023).

Global crises have become a constant feature of modern societal dynamics (Boin & Lagadec, 2000), continuously challenging established norms and pushing the world into a state of perpetual transformation. These crises require fundamental adaptations within and across social systems (Lagadec, 2009), compelling individuals across all levels of society to adapt to unforeseen changes swiftly and effectively. Interchangeably, as organisations adapt to their changing environment, they are also expected to influence the course of change and be proactive rather than merely reactive.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a global crisis that originated unexpectedly and created emerging needs for people and organisations to self-organise and adapt. Governments, policymakers, managers, workers, students, and others worldwide found themselves forced to adjust rapidly to unfamiliar ways of life and work. The shift was particularly pronounced in education, transforming teaching from a predominantly social activity to one that often required isolated effort that demanded the technological proficiency many educators, parents, and students lacked. Higher education witnessed a parallel transformation not only in teaching but in research, with online collaboration becoming the norm.

Although work practices are locally established, they are also influenced by ‘forces’ and actors above and beyond them like national and international dimensions. During the Covid-19 pandemic a crisis outside the HE system became global and dramatically affected the actors within it, requiring them to adapt rapidly if the system were to continue functioning. While individuals

and departments adapted in their own contexts throughout the world, they had to accommodate global conditions and national policies, and implement practices that were often decided by institutions.

An examination of how organisations and individuals within them, including managers and workers, perceive and navigate the rapid changes imposed by global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic is therefore crucial to formulate and implement more effective strategies that can address the challenges such crises pose. This paper adds to the growing body of research analysing this phenomenon.

2.2 *Complex Adaptive Systems: A Theory to Analyse Adaptation Processes in Organisations*

Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory focuses on the adaptive aspects of systems embedded in other larger systems and dealing with high levels of complexity (Holland, 1996; Stacey, 1996). CAS thus offers a way of examining phenomena as evolutionary multilevel, multidimensional processes, enabling the visualisation of organisations as comprising multiple and diverse elements that constantly interact with themselves and with their environment. It offers us a means to analyse the dynamics of Finnish HEIs' self-organisation and adaptability that led to the emergence of hybrid work.

There is no standard definition of how CAS are composed, and their elements have been critically discussed since the 1990s (Gell-Mann, 1994). However, despite these definitions' diversity, they agree on the fundamental ideas of adaptive systems' specificities (McDaniel, 2007). Tilebein (2006, p. 1089) posits that complex adaptive systems are 'network[s] of elements whose interactions cause the emergence of overall system level properties'. In addition, Benham-Hutchins and Clancy (2010, p. 353) specify that 'complex adaptive systems are distinct types of complex systems that have the ability to learn and adapt based on environmental cues, feedback, or events'. These networks of elements function and evolve according to a specific set of rules that informs and makes sense of these elements' communications or interactions (Stacey, 1996; see also Holland, 1996). Complex systems share 'coherence in the face of change', which depends on many interactions among the system elements, as well as their 'adaptation or learning' (Holland, 1996, p. 4). These interactions are non-linear and happen without central control, which can (and often does) lead to self-organisation which, beyond hierarchical structures, may generate spontaneous and not necessarily intentional new system behaviour (McDaniel, 2007). In HEIs the matrix of academic and administrative realities, as well as the specifics of disciplines and programmes, creates a complex environment with its own autonomous workforce, internal logics, and substance-specific

rules. During Covid-19, however, they all encountered similar environmental change (independent of the changes in the substance field) and were required to adapt within the same institutional and national regulatory framework.

2.2.1 Self-Organisation

Organisations such as HEIs can be understood as complex adaptive systems integrated into larger systems and constituted by smaller systems such as departments (Stacey, 1996). Complex adaptive organisations and the fluid and non-linear dynamics among their diversity of elements are affected by often unpredictable phenomena occurring both within themselves and their environment and other systems. This can cause a cascade effect, with significant ripples reaching the organisation and its sub-systems. In following the CAS lens, the organisational elements creatively self-organise in such circumstances to adapt to these phenomena, leading to the emergence of new patterns of unexpected behaviour at the organisation's system level (Stacey, 1996).

We concur with Clancy's (2014) argument that complex adaptive systems are 'all about flow: long and fast, short and slow', and that 'systems will generate better and better configurations so that the currents within them flow more easily' (pp. 190–191) and maintain their functionality. This is the case in teaching, researching, and managing in HEIs, where all the system's elements must self-organise to continue working and maintain its functioning.

Organisations can therefore be understood as fluid structures that are frequently in a state of hybridity, constantly attempting to maintain their equilibrium to continue to function in accordance with their design. When any internal or external event/phenomenon affects them, organisations actively attempt to return to their state of equilibrium, and two competing practices can form a hybrid that can in turn become the new normal. Hybridisation can thus be seen as a form of organisational resilience (Giustiniano et al., 2018, in Pinheiro, Frigotto, & Young, 2021).

Denyer (2017, n/a) posits that 'organizational resilience is the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper'. Holling (1996, p. 33) argues that resilience can be divided into two complementary branches: *engineering* and *ecological resilience*. The first is related to the maintenance of the system's efficient function; the second concerns the system's ability to continue existing in accordance with its design in the face of sudden disruptions (Holling, 1996, p. 33; see also Frigotto, Young, & Pinheiro, 2021). Engineering resilience therefore 'concentrates on stability near an equilibrium steady state'; ecological resilience 'emphasizes conditions far from any equilibrium steady state, where instabilities can flip a system into another regime of behavior'

(Holling, 1996, p. 33). In complex systems it is often necessary to deal with both near- and far-equilibrium stability states (Holling, 1996). Engineering resilience in HEIs can be related to everyday aspects of teaching and learning, granted the existence of the required infrastructure, enough qualified teachers, and funding for salaries. Meanwhile, ecological resilience can be associated with moments of critical crisis, including the system's ability to cope with remote work during the sudden emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, where without such adaptability and resilience, the HE system's main processes would be taken for granted.

3 Data and Methods

This study's data were extracted from the open-ended questions of surveys of *top managers* (e.g., rectors) and *mid-managers* (e.g., deans) at Finnish higher education institutions, and *academic staff* (early career academics such as doctoral or postdoctoral researchers; mid-career academics such as lecturers or assistant professors; and senior academics such as professors) working at these institutions' education faculties (see Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1 Respondents by management position

Managers 2020 <i>N</i> = 34	<i>Top managers</i>	26% (<i>N</i> = 9)
	<i>Mid-managers</i>	74% (<i>N</i> = 25)
Managers 2021 <i>N</i> = 24	<i>Top managers</i>	33% (<i>N</i> = 8)
	<i>Mid-managers</i>	58% (<i>N</i> = 14)
	<i>Unidentified</i>	8% (<i>N</i> = 2)
Managers 2022 <i>N</i> = 22	<i>Top managers</i>	23% (<i>N</i> = 5)
	<i>Mid-managers</i>	64% (<i>N</i> = 14)
	<i>Unidentified</i>	14% (<i>N</i> = 3)
Academic staff 2023 <i>N</i> = 144	<i>Professors</i>	9% (<i>N</i> = 14)
	<i>Mid-career</i>	51% (<i>N</i> = 73)
	<i>Early career</i>	40% (<i>N</i> = 57)

We applied inductive and deductive qualitative content analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009; Schreier, 2014) to the open-ended questions of surveys of Finnish HEI managers in 2020, 2021, and 2022, and a 2023 survey of academic staff at education faculties in Finnish universities. Categories were created based on the previous literature and this study's aims (e.g., 'workload', 'implications of remote work on work-life balance') and were complemented

by information from the surveys (e.g., ‘workload: increased’, ‘implications of remote work for work-life balance: improved’).

We then compared the findings in these data to the findings of the previous surveys of HEI managers in the spring of 2020, shortly after the Covid-19 lockdowns were implemented, and in the spring of 2021, a little after the lockdowns had ended, and when some institutions were slowly opening their doors to in-person activities. The goal was to understand changes or continuities in managers’ perceptions at the start of the health crisis and after the lockdowns. We also compared the findings of the academic staff survey with those of the manager survey, with the aim of understanding if their views on the different forms of work and their implications during and after the Covid-19 crisis were aligned. This methodological strategy enabled an analysis of how work practices had changed (or not) in Finnish HEIs, and how they were understood now that the crisis was over.

4 Findings

In this section we discuss the responses to the surveys’ open-ended questions. First, we present the responses of Finnish HEIs’ management staff to the survey in the spring of 2022 and the academic staff of Finnish education faculties in the spring of 2023. We then analyse the evolution of the managers’ answers over the three surveys (2020–2022).

4.1 *Contextualising the Findings: A Descriptive Comparison of Managers’ Perceptions over Time (2020–2022)*

As the introduction described, this paper belongs to a series of studies of academic managers’ perceptions of the changes and adaptations in work practices required by the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 is a good example of a non-linear and unpredictable phenomenon occurring in one system (i.e. a health system) and spreading ripples into others, leading to a significant crisis (a state of far-equilibrium stability) – in this case in global society as a whole (Angeli & Montefusco, 2020). In response to the WHO’s declaration of a pandemic in early 2020 and the subsequent lockdowns, educational organisations, including HEIs, throughout the world had to quickly self-organise to remain functioning (ecological resilience). Their elements (teachers, students, managers, and others) had to adapt to new forms of work that entailed distance from their colleagues, students, and teachers, and were highly dependent on digital technologies.

An analysis of the three manager surveys (2020, 2021, and 2022 – see Appendix A) shows that the required switch from onsite to remote work was

initially expected to be problematic but actually happened quite smoothly. All Finnish HE actors (managers, academic, and non-academic staff, as well as students) self-organised and adapted to new work practices efficiently despite the increased workload the transition required (e.g., more meetings and emails were needed initially to coordinate distance work and teaching or to help people adapt to and learn about digital tools) because inter-level communication (Finnish government – university – faculty –...) was also considered deficient and confusing, requiring local clarification and decision making. The managers also highlighted the need for workers to develop skills to organise their workdays better to balance working life and personal time. This aspect is identified across the manager surveys.

Nevertheless, as early as 2020, but most significantly in 2021, managers emphasised that working remotely and meeting online had proved more efficient than on site. Managers perceived staff members as learning quickly how to use the necessary working tools, and meetings were more efficient, with less time wasted on small talk and informal discussions. Several managers highlighted that meetings seemed to have become more superficial, however, and deep reflection on topics seemed non-existent. In the 2022 survey managers indicated that meetings that required deep reflection and decision making were again being held in person.

In the 2020 survey managers were already describing the benefits of working remotely, including flexible work hours and the possibility of taking physical exercise during the day. These aspects were less mentioned as the years passed, as remote and hybrid work normalised and it no longer seemed important to mention. Another aspect, however, emerged in the 2021 survey: concern about the wellbeing of both staff and students. Managers argued that the management of work and personal time remained a challenge for them and their staff, and this caused concern about psychological and physical wellbeing, as well as worries about staff losing their sense of community and opportunities to network in person. Digital fatigue was obvious at this point. Managers therefore worried that they were unable to assess at a distance and with digital tools how individuals were dealing with lockdowns in general and remote work in particular. However, to cope with isolation and the lack of informal networking, HEI actors took the initiative of organising activities like online coffee breaks. Stacey (1996) argues that a specific set of rules informs and makes sense of systems' communication or interaction. In this case creating new conditions enabled HEIs efficiently to continue the socialisation and networking they required to function.

In the 2021 survey some managers argued that international cooperation had temporarily decreased, though research seemed to work well, even

internationally. The surveyed staff did not share this view, arguing that inter-university and international collaboration had increased due to the availability of new digital tools and their own ability to use them better. In 2022 managers no longer pointed to this reduction of international cooperation as a challenge. This also happened in relation to conference participation, which was said to have been improved by online conference programmes.

To summarise, the remote work the Covid-19 crisis imposed seems to have created more efficient work practices as a result of employees' self-organisation of new working tools and adaptation to online work practices and communication. Remote and hybrid work therefore began to be considered a 'normal' way of working.

4.2 *Hybrid Work Practices as the New 'Normal'? A Comparison of Managers and Academic Staff*

Managers such as deans working in a permanently changing environment might benefit from recognising organisations as CASs and accepting the uncertainty and unpredictability characterising their organisation, as this left little room for 'command, control, and planning' to maintain their organisations' ability to function efficiently and promote 'productive action' (McDaniel, 2007, p. 27), even in the face of unexpected problems. Managers in complex organisations like HEIs could thus benefit from understanding 'cycles of crisis and learning' (Holling, 1996, p. 42). After several years had passed, with the Covid-19 pandemic now endemic and the lockdowns over, we asked what had changed in how HEIs worked, and how managers and staff perceived the changes.

Based on the management staff's responses to the 2022 survey, hybrid work was now established and even welcomed (except by one participant, who urged a return to onsite work as it had been before Covid-19). Managers' responses identified challenges, benefits, and possible solutions regarding hybrid work in HEIs (see details in Appendices A and B).

Managers perceived benefits in working from home or in a hybrid format because it saved commuting time and helped with family life. Managers also perceived hybrid work as flexible, facilitating a preferred personal work pattern (remote vs in person = flexibility was welcome). International interaction and cooperation had also become easier, and participating in international conferences was more convenient and environmentally friendly if there was an online version of the conference programme.

Nevertheless, although most managers surveyed supported hybrid work practices, they also identified challenges and increased complexities. For example, while some mentioned that some students would like to continue

having classes at home, most managers understood teaching and learning as an in-person activity, especially for students starting their university studies. They also saw the preparation of online or hybrid teaching as more demanding for teachers and requiring more hours of work. A suggested solution was to offer teaching for first- and second-year students mostly on campus, which promoted the development of their sense of community, while students from other years could be allowed to choose between attending on campus or online.

They also argued that it was important to create a balance between work time and personal time and remote work and onsite work. This was challenging, not only for each individual but at the managerial level. Managers suggested solutions for this, including focusing on the development of individual self-management skills and the creation of 'on-campus' days, when tasks that benefited from in-person work could take place. The latter suggestion would also be a solution for two further identified problems: staff were losing or had lost their sense of community because of remote work; and there was no informal or spontaneous networking among colleagues.

The Finnish HE managers participating in the survey also perceived the major digital leap the Covid-19 pandemic caused as beneficial: digital tools were now better; there were more of them; and people had to learn how to use them. However, they pointed out that they had to attend many mostly online or hybrid meetings. This had probably increased with the end of Covid-19 lockdowns and the transition to on-campus/hybrid working. Nevertheless, these meetings seemed more efficient online, except for those requiring deep discussions and reflection on an issue and when decision making was required, both of which it was felt worked better in person on campus.

Managers also felt it would be beneficial if a manual of best practices in different HEIs were created to help them be more efficient in their own practices and in deciding what others under their management should do.

Finally, managers perceived coordinating staff's hybrid work as more demanding than only remote or only on-campus work practices. They also argued that they had difficulties observing what was happening in the organisation as a whole from a bird's eye perspective, and felt they were losing or had lost control of the staff they managed.

Interestingly, many of the responses of the staff of education faculties surveyed in 2023 matched those of managers. Staff said they were pleased with most of the changes the Covid-19 pandemic had caused. Remote or hybrid work increased academics' flexibility and autonomy, and most said they were not considering returning to work full-time on campus. The benefits and challenges mentioned were very similar to those managers mentioned. Hybrid work patterns were perceived as here to stay, enabling better connections

among family members and saving commuting time, and working from home offered a quiet environment that was often lacking on site, making the working day more efficient and productive. This seemed to be even more the case because university offices had in the meantime been reorganised, and many who prolonged their remote work beyond the final lockdown recommendations had lost their offices or desk spaces on campus and now had to work in common areas or offices shared by several people. This was considered unsuitable by the staff surveyed. Interestingly, only some of the staff mentioned the flexibility to take exercise during the day as a benefit of remote work.

Another benefit of hybrid work the surveyed staff at Finnish education faculties perceived, and which they shared with our study's HE managers, was the improvement in digital tools and the need to learn how to use them. Such tools offered useful alternatives for collaborative work, meetings, and online teaching and learning. They also enabled some to make their classes more dynamic and interesting than they were in person. Nevertheless, some mentioned that there had been too many online meetings since the beginning of the pandemic. This was not, however, a central topic in their responses.

Regarding international collaboration, staff also felt they had benefited from online tools. Inter-university and international collaboration had become easier with the increase of available digital tools, and some also welcomed the new online format of conferences.

The most controversial topic observed in the survey responses was teaching practices. Some staff argued that teaching should be done in person, as students needed personal contact with colleagues and teachers for better learning. They also said some skills and subjects could not be worked on at a distance, and that they were worried about students' – and other staff's – isolation and mental or emotional wellbeing. Others, however, said students had increasingly demanded remote and hybrid teaching, that teaching online could also be interactive and captivating, and that students enjoyed the flexibility of online classes.

The Covid-19 pandemic created an unpredictable organisational environment that complicated management and planning. Much of the work relied on employees' self-organisation and individual adaptability. As universities were loosely coupled and often bottom-heavy organisations, employees' autonomy allowed decentralised adaptability. In Finnish universities there was a great deal of autonomy, including in teaching. This allowed the system to adapt without centralised direction, despite the fact that support services had been centralised in most Finnish HEIs in recent decades. Learning took place efficiently, and the inclusion of online coffee breaks and get-togethers allowed academics to share their experiences, successes, and challenges. Meanwhile,

support services could provide the necessary technical resources and training for learning the basics of the required ICT tools.

More efficient new work practices emerged unexpectedly due to Covid-19, resulting in a readaptation to hybrid work after the lockdowns. For example, meetings became more efficient, less time was spent commuting between venues and localities, and international activities increased to an extent. None of these impacts was planned. The pandemic also prompted more efficient use of office space. Feedback on the benefits and challenges of remote work was based on mutual trust and shared concern for the wellbeing of staff and students, as well as the quality of work. At a time of externally imposed adaptations it was therefore probably more efficient than it would have been if management or political decision makers had imposed the changes internally. Higher education institutions were highly resilient and adapted well. The learning cycle during the crisis was rapid and seemed to lead to lasting changes in academic work and teaching.

5 Conclusions

In this study we analysed the perceptions of top and middle managers in Finnish universities regarding the changes in work patterns due to Covid-19 and after the end of the mandatory lockdowns. We also compared managers' responses with a sample of academic staff from Finnish education faculties at a time when organisations were again moving to in-person forms of work. We adopted Complex Adaptive Systems theory to describe and analyse the nature of higher education institutions in the area of complex societal change.

Our analysis concludes that Finnish HEI staff could quickly and successfully self-organise and adapt to an external phenomenon that strongly affected their work environments – the Covid-19 pandemic. This also reflects the resilient characteristics of this higher education system. In our first survey (2020) managers stated that they expected major complications in staff's and students' adaptation to working, teaching, and learning remotely. Based on data from the subsequent surveys (2021, 2022), this expectation was unfulfilled.

Although they identified an increased workload in terms of the number of meetings and teachers' needs to adjust their classes to an online environment, managers argued that meetings in Teams and Zoom were generally more efficient and objective than in-person meetings. Exceptions were meetings that required collaborative reflection or decision making, which both participant groups argued were more efficient in person. This was also expressed in the

2022 and 2023 surveys regarding some courses that required in-person contact or at least some sort of hybrid practice.

Both managers and academic staff identified the benefits of working remotely or in a hybrid format, such as saving commuting time and being able to exercise during the day. The 2021 manager survey, however, began to reveal concerns about academic staff and student wellbeing and mental health, and this was also observed in the 2022 survey. However, this was not a major concern for the academic staff surveyed in 2023. Most of these participants said they did not intend to return to in-person work entirely, and that they would combine remote and distance work – hybrid work – which seemed to have become a permanent feature. The managers surveyed in 2022 also identified a hybrid work pattern as a common reality. They supported and saw benefits in such a flexible work pattern and its associated schedules.

The most recent manager (2022) and academic staff (2023) surveys also revealed some common perceptions: both identified and were concerned about the loss of a sense of belonging to academic communities and the lack of informal networking. Furthermore, more work from home had led to a redesign and reduction of universities' spaces, with university heads deciding it was unnecessary to keep the same number of offices, as they were now often empty. The decreasing number of offices generated discomfort among some academic staff, who pointed to problems like a lack of meeting privacy with the emerging open workspaces.

Based on all the surveys, changes in work practices did not adversely affect international and inter-university research collaboration: indeed, as digital tools improved, distance collaboration became easier, and participation in conferences more inclusive and environmentally friendly.

It is clear that managers', academic staff's, and students' ability to adapt to the emerging and unexpected health emergency is good, and this enables Finnish HEIs to continue functioning and serve their purposes of research, teaching, and learning, ultimately leading to new ways of working that include in-person and distance work, and emerging perceptions that these new practices may have become permanently hybrid. This ability to adapt to distance work may say something about the ideals and logics that characterise Finland and its culture of trust (Niemi, 2016; Niemi & Sinnemäki, 2019), which themselves may see an evolution towards some sort of hybridity in these ideals and logics.

Remote (and hybrid) work is not itself new to Finland. As the early parts of this paper explained, ten per cent of the Finnish population were already working either remotely or only partly at the office. Nevertheless, extended hybrid work patterns in HE require adaptation from HE managers, academic

staff, and students alike. At least in most cases this adaptation seems to have been a success: since Covid-19 hybrid work has become the 'new normal' for most of this study's participants.

The Complex Adaptive Systems framework applied in this paper provides us with tools for understanding HEIS' complex and diverse changing operating environment and their adaptation to internal and external phenomena. It is important to recognise that the Covid-19 period that started in early 2020 was not a single crisis with a clear beginning and end occurring in a particular domain such as organisations. Rather, it can be identified as the first modern crisis to affect the whole of society and all its functions. CAS reveals that there is no moment when organisations can stop adapting, as society is in a state of constant change. We now acknowledge that Covid-19 was the first, but certainly not the last, modern global crisis. Organisations with societal functions such as HEIS must constantly respond to the changes around them.

The hybrid work arrangement exemplifies a single change that has become systemic. It may have become an ongoing change linked to the next identified possible crisis, the environmental crisis, which HEIS are expected to play a significant role in addressing. Hybrid work started as an immediate response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It continued as a way of supporting individuals' and families' wellbeing, and of reducing the environmental impact of travel. Hybrid working arrangements aptly exemplify how HEIS are adapting to changing public discourses and environments.

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Appendix A – Some comparable responses of managers to changes in work arrangements from 2020, 2021, 2022

2020	2021	2022
Quick and surprisingly seamless adoption of digital working tools, including e-learning tools	Effective and efficient adoption of digital working tools; however, a level of digital fatigue also observed among staff	Effective use of digital tools to carry out work tasks efficiently
Transition to remote work has been managed well, with the assistance of effective support staff	Preference for remote working, even after the pandemic	Hybrid and remote work seen as part of future work arrangements, as they remain popular amongst staff
Communication issues between organisational levels, leading to a need for more clarification and decision making by managers	Fewer online meetings and more efficient agendas and decision making as remote work progressed; however, managers also perceive meetings as more superficial and lacking deep reflection on topics	The need for in-person meetings for important and reflexive decision-making meetings
Difficulty maintaining work-life balance	Challenges in maintaining work-life balance persists	Balancing work and personal life remains a challenge with remote working
Most staff members have accepted and adapted well to remote work	Loss of sense of community and in-person networking opportunities, leading to concerns about psychological and physical wellbeing, which managers have found difficult to assess due to the distance associated with being online	Loss of sense of community persists, with hybrid/fully remote working arrangements alongside concerns for employee wellbeing
Work day flexibility, however, increases in online meetings and emails, resulting in an increased workload and more complexity in managing work schedules		Despite some challenges, benefits of hybrid working include time saved in commuting and easier management of family life

**Appendix B – Answers to surveys post-Covid-19 lockdown
(managers, 2022 and academic staff, 2023)**

Top and mid-managers	Faculties of education academic staff
<p>General thoughts about and experiences of hybridity in work arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Managers see hybrid and remote work as part of future work arrangements based on workers’ preferences for 100% remote work or hybrid work. 	<p>General thoughts about and experiences of hybridity in work arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A large majority of staff said that they did more remote work than before the pandemic = hybrid work with different number of days at home and others on site. Some staff have never returned to onsite work and have maintained 100% remote work mode until today
<p>Benefits of hybrid work arrangements</p> <p>Most managers find hybridity in work arrangement acceptable and sometimes even desirable. They identified the following benefits:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) time saved in commuting; (2) easier management of family life; (3) more flexibility for staff in their preferred work arrangement (remote vs in-person); (4) international interaction and cooperation have also become easier; (5) participating in international conferences is more convenient and ecological; (6) online meetings are more efficient 	<p>Benefits of hybrid work arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Almost all participants consider working more remotely, with flexible schedules and only a few days on site, an improvement from the dominant work pattern before the Covid-19 pandemic. They identified the following benefits: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) time saved in commuting; (2) flexibility in working calendar, with staff having more autonomy in planning their workday, as well as to include activities like exercise in the middle of the day; (3) working remotely is more efficient and productive; (4) increase in collaborative work with colleagues from other universities and in other countries; (5) hybrid/remote teaching format works, and students appreciate the flexibility; (6) enhancement of digital tools and skills as a result of remote working
<p>Ongoing challenges in hybrid work arrangements</p> <p>Despite the benefits, managers acknowledge ongoing challenges with hybrid work arrangements, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) finding the right balance between remote and in-person work; (2) diminished informal and spontaneous networking; (3) loss of/potential loss of sense of community among staff; (4) blurred boundaries between personal and work time; 	<p>Ongoing challenges in hybrid work arrangements</p> <p>Despite the benefits, some staff members also identify challenges, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) difficulty in dividing work into suitable parts; (2) difficulty in maintaining boundaries between personal and work time; (3) loss of spontaneous networking with colleagues – a problematic issue for researchers, as a lot of work emerges during informal networking moments; (4) loss of sense of community,

(cont.)

Top and mid-managers	Faculties of education academic staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (5) excessive online and in-person meetings; (6) ensuring that important reflexive and decision-making meetings happen in person; (7) difficulty deciding which tasks/ activities should remain online, and which should be in person; (8) staff and student wellbeing remains a concern; (9) difficulty/complexity in managing multilocation work, (10) teaching requires in-person contact in at least some sessions; (11) online teaching continues to be identified as requiring more work from teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (5) students expect communication to flow faster and to have more remote/hybrid classes; (6) teaching should be maintained as an in-person activity; it does not work as well online/remotely; (7) teaching more practical subjects cannot be done online (teacher skills, natural science subjects, etc.); (8) hybrid teaching requires more preparation time; (9) loss of individual office space/desk by people who mostly worked remotely as university grounds/spaces were rearranged; (10) excessive number of online meetings; (11) students and staff are more isolated/student and staff wellbeing concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers presented several solutions and raised some questions about the above challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) inefficiency of maintaining regular working space as it was before Covid-19, as people work a lot more from home; (2) adoption of a hybrid work pattern with different levels of flexibility, depending on the task; (3) establishment of 'on-campus' days for tasks that work better in person; (4) development of self-management skills is fundamental; (5) compiling best practices in different HEIs; (6) in teaching 1st and 2nd year students should have more in-person classes, while older students can choose their mode of learning (remote or on site) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most staff consider that remote work is good for most tasks, but for teaching this is debatable: while some believe it to be an in-person activity, others argue teaching and learning online have been working well, and students appreciate this.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At the time of the survey managers expressed uncertainty regarding the future of working modes, including those that might arise from the ongoing war in Ukraine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some staff surveyed said they already worked remotely/hybridly before Covid-19.

Nested Hybridity in International Higher Education Collaboration during the Times of War

A Comparative Study of Finland and Sweden

Henna Juusola

Abstract

This research explores the nested hybridity and moral justification of international higher education collaboration (IHEC) in Finland and Sweden, in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Based on 16 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023 with representatives with strategic responsibility for IHEC from Finnish and Swedish higher education institutions, as well as national documents, the findings show that IHEC operates as a nested hybridity, where national policies, organisational strategies and practical operations dynamically interact. However, these interactions are partly emphasised differently in Finland and Sweden, with distinct justification frameworks at different levels of hybridity, shaped by national characteristics and geopolitical contexts.

Keywords

international higher education collaboration – war in Ukraine – Finnish higher education – Swedish higher education – nested hybridity – moral justification

1 Introduction

Hybridity in international higher education collaboration (IHEC) is multifaceted. It combines intersections with different geographical locations, cultural and social environments and policy objectives (Marginson, 2022), which are interpreted in different ways within higher education institutions themselves (Bamberger & Morris, 2023). IHEC is also highly sensitive to global circumstances and the social and political dynamics that these entail. This sensitivity can manifest itself in various and unexpected ways. For example, geopolitical shifts may change immigration policies and diplomatic relations or directly affect international mobility (Juusola & Nokkala, 2024).

In recent years, major global events that have had a significant impact on IHEC activities, at least regionally, have been the spread of COVID-19 and Russia's attack on Ukraine. In this chapter, I address a recent example of unexpected situations by focusing on how the Russian invasion of Ukraine is accommodated in the IHEC activities of Finnish and Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs). IHEC in this study includes activities such as international student exchanges and strategic partnerships (Bamberger & Morris, 2023). Based on previous research (Juusola & Nokkala, 2024), it seems clear that the war in Ukraine has had a significant impact on IHEC activities in Finland. This study refines these observations by considering the starting points of two Nordic country contexts, Finland and Sweden.

This research addresses the following questions: How does the war in Ukraine manifest itself at the national, organisational and operational levels in Finland and Sweden in the context of IHEC, and 2) how are these reorganised premises justified? The interpretation is based on the analytical approaches of HEIs as nested hybridity (Pekkola et al., 2020) and the convention-theoretical understanding of reality tests (Boltanski, 2011) and moral justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). These approaches highlight the efforts of higher education institutions to pursue the 'common good' in challenging circumstances, drawing on a variety of values and underlying principles. This in turn allows us to observe how, from IHEC's perspective, HEIs are increasingly situated as nested hybridities at the intersection of moral and pragmatic questions. The future direction of these issues is sought through the deployment of strategies, but their resolution requires situational awareness in order to act appropriately in the moment.

2 Shared Values and Diverging Strategies of IHEC in Finland and Sweden

In general, IHEC is linked to several institutional, national, European and, increasingly, global objectives. For higher education institutions (HEIs), IHEC can mean, for example, attracting international students (Filippou & Jokila, 2024) and improving research quality through international collaboration (Bamberger & Morris, 2023). Institutional goals are also linked to national and European goals, for example through the development of reputation and regional competitiveness (Brankovic, 2018). Furthermore, IHEC is increasingly expected to act as a catalyst for solving global problems and promoting sustainable development (de Wit & Deca, 2020). As such, IHEC's activities also have a moral obligation to embrace diversity and strive for the global common good.

Starting points such as those described above also apply to the Finnish and Swedish higher education sectors, which have traditionally been rooted in principles of equity, transparency and democratic values (Rönnerberg & Hinke, 2023), and where education has been seen as a pillar for maintaining and developing the Nordic welfare state module. In addition, Europeanisation and increasing aims to increase incoming and outgoing student mobility (Ala-Vähälä et al., 2021; Alexiadou & Rönnerberg, 2022) have been seen as important aspects of higher education policy in both countries in recent decades. Accordingly, internationalisation in both countries is also strongly linked to their own labour policy starting points and commercial interests (Alexiadou & Rönnerberg, 2022; Juusola & Nokkala, 2024).

Despite the common Nordic value base, there are also differences between the goals of Finnish and Swedish IHEC activities. For example, solidarity and the development of collaboration with the global South has been one of the main rationales for IHEC activities in Sweden for decades (Alexiadou & Rönnerberg, 2022). In Finland, similar approaches have been promoted, for example with the establishment of the Global Networks initiative (MINEDU, 2024), funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, but visible education policies have been strategically focused on attracting skilled workers and promoting education export implementations (Juusola & Nokkala, 2024). These are not entirely exclusive to Sweden either, and there have also been initiatives by national higher education teams to boost the economy, for example by emphasising the knowledge nation and introducing annual tuition fees for students from outside the EU/EHEA (Alexiadou & Rönnerberg, 2022).

At the same time, geopolitical differences have partly coloured the education-related internationalisation goals of these two countries. For example, Finland had a representative of the national education network 'Team Finland' in Russia, whose aim was to promote Finnish higher education and research and to foster bilateral collaboration between Finland and Russia (MINEDU, 2017). The Finnish government had also funded a bilateral mobility programme to support such collaboration (Mäkinen, 2023). After the outbreak of the war, Team Finland's activities in Russia were suspended. Nevertheless, educational collaboration also produced results. This becomes clear when examining the nationalities of international students in Finland, where Russian citizens were the second largest group both in 2018 and even after the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022 (NAE, 2023a). In Sweden, on the other hand, the number of students arriving from Russia is not among the most common nationalities in these sample years, although some students from Russia do study in Sweden (SCS, 2024). However, as far as student exchanges are concerned, the number

of students coming from Russia to both Finland and Sweden fell sharply after the war in Ukraine and has practically stopped (ESF, 2024; SCS, 2024).

Overall, the IHEC reveals underlying factors related to geography, history and security policy. Finland's historical location between Russia and Sweden has shaped its international relations for centuries. In addition, the Russian-speaking minority is the largest minority group in Finland, which has created a rich social and cultural connection between Finland and Russia (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2024). In Sweden, the Russian-speaking population is significantly smaller (Karpava et al., 2018), and relations to Russia is likely to be more visible in national politics and less so in everyday life. From the perspective of the IHEC, Finland's relations with Russia are thus socially more multilayered than Sweden's relations with Russia. It is therefore not surprising that, prior to the war in Ukraine, Finland had a strong strategic focus on developing both educational and research collaboration with Russian higher education institutions (MINEDU, 2017).

3 Nested Hybridity and More Justification in IHEC

IHEC can be seen as an example of nested hybridity of higher education, where public value is created through non-linear processes that occur simultaneously at different levels and are linked to different drivers (Pekkola et al., 2020, 2022). Indeed, IHEC is not situated only in the middle ground between public and private, but also between regulatory and non-regulatory, nationally embedded and cross-border (see e.g., Marginson, 2022). This gives rise to sometimes conflicting and multi-layered value-creation processes. For example, national labour policy goals include attracting international students, while HEIs seek international visibility through foreign partnerships and facilitate internationalisation opportunities for staff and students (Bamberger & Morris, 2024; de Wit & Deca, 2020; Filippou & Jokila, 2024).

Multi-faceted nature of IHEC reflects the complexity of nested hybridity. As Pekkola et al. (2020) note, nested hybridity in higher education involves multiple levels, including policy, system, organisational, positional, work and individual levels. These levels are interlinked, meaning that the effectiveness of policy and strategic actions is ultimately manifested in micro-level professional practices (Pekkola et al., 2020). Nested hybridity is also related to the value creation of higher education in the public sphere and its operational legitimacy (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017; Pekkola et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant in times of uncertainty. For example, geopolitical upheavals, such as the war in Ukraine, may lead to both strategic and moral re-evaluations within IHEC, affecting operational accountability (Juusola & Nokkala, 2024).

This study examines the “swings” and “tremors” caused by the war in Ukraine as a reality test – a test of what is practically possible and morally acceptable for IHEC activities when previous realities and assumptions no longer apply. According to Boltanski (2011), a reality test represents a social framing of the world, assessing our ability to explain “what is” and “what could be.” Reality tests thus embody the broader social order, aiming to create a shared understanding of the social world (Boltanski, 2011; Cloutier et al., 2024).

In the IHEC context, for example, social representation may form areas from which fee-paying students are recruited. Similarly, the IHEC ‘reality’ gathers elements from different angles such as national higher education policy strategies and EU funding instruments such as the Erasmus plus mobility programme. Thus, the reality of IHEC is sustained at local, national and global levels, and these levels overlap (Marginson, 2022). For example, the funding instruments of the Erasmus plus programme can be applied nationally in a way that corresponds to national strategic areas, or institutionally in a way that corresponds to the institution’s own starting points. Reality tests support this, and these reality tests also form categories and symbolic representations with which HEIs can justify what is fair and what is unfair. However, according to Boltanski (2011), there is a distinction between reality and the world. Boltanski (2011) defines the world as ‘everything that happens’, so the world itself is messy and unpredictable. To deal with this, HEIs can focus on controlling their operational attention to reality, which is therefore either still supported or changed by reality tests.

In this study, reality tests (Boltanski, 2011) require HEIs to consider ‘what is’ the appropriate approach for IHE and ‘what could be’ in the future. It is possible that a single crisis, such as the war in Ukraine, could trigger multiple tests for different IHEC activities, such as questions about the admission of students from Russia or the discontinuation of the previous research collaboration. Similarly, in reality tests, the justification for the activity is sought through conventions that represent socio-cultural frames, each of which has a different set of values and criteria for justification (Diaz-Bone & de Larquier, 2022). Previous studies on convention theory (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Imdorf & Leemann, 2023; Ye & Nylander, 2024) have identified a total of ten conventions: Civic (emphasising solidarity, social responsibility), Industrial (emphasising efficiency and standardisation), Domestic (emphasising tradition and hierarchy), Inspired (emphasising passion and innovation), Market (emphasising competition and commodification), Fame (emphasising prestige and visibility), Project (emphasising network and project), Green (emphasising environmental sustainability) and Prospective (emphasising anticipation and expectation). According to convention theory, actors (in this case representatives of higher education institutions and national agencies) have the ability to

rely on the appropriate or suitable conventions for the situation when seeking a value-based justification for the activity. However, conventions are not stable but situational. Thus, in different situations, a justification can be made by combining different conventions. (Diaz-Bone & de Larquier, 2022).

As shown in Figure 7.1, the nested hybridity (Pekkola et al., 2020, 2022) of IHEC is manifested in this study at three levels: the national policy level, the strategic level that defines international collaboration of higher education institutions (HEIs), and the operational level of IHEC activities. At these levels, the war in Ukraine requires a redefinition of the moral legitimacy of IHE activities, as the surrounding reality of “what is” and “what could be” (Boltanski, 2011) has shifted. As a result, the public accountability of IHE is being redefined in relation to both Russia and Ukraine. Accountability is understood in this study in terms of conventions that represent moral legitimacy (Diaz-Bone & Larquier, 2022, Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). These conventions are not merely institutional principles, but broader, collectively recognised social frameworks of the common good (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) that are relied upon to ensure that actions are publicly acceptable. This is particularly important in situations where there are no pre-established practices or planned strategies. However, these legitimations are not inherently stable and may need to be reassessed as circumstances evolve (see, for example, Juusola & Nokkala, 2024). The different levels of nested hybridity also form a dynamic whole, with national-level decisions influencing both the strategic choices of HEIs and their practical operations. Similarly, in operational activities, a specific value-based justification may emerge strongly and be reflected in the decisions made by HEIs. It is also possible that conflicts may arise between different conventions at different levels of hybridity, necessitating compromises.

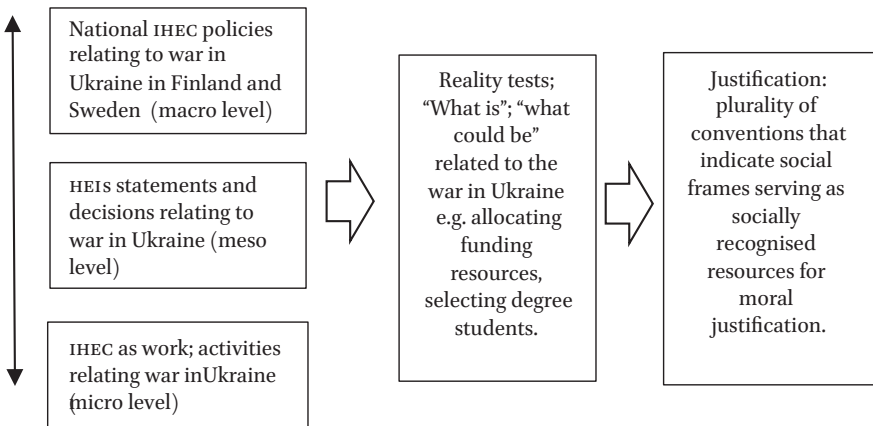


FIGURE 7.1 Moral justification in nested hybridity of IHEC in the situation of war in Ukraine

4 Data and Method

The research strategy of this study is based on comparative higher education research (Kosmützky et al., 2020), which focuses two geopolitical context (Finland, Sweden), and the higher education institutions in these countries. Therefore, the units of analysis occur simultaneously at least on three levels: macro (national context in Finland and Sweden), meso (higher education institutions) and micro (international activities). This approach brings to light country-specific, and organisation-specific similarities and differences (see e.g., Kosmützky, 2020). In the choice of countries, Finland and Sweden, attention has been paid to their comparability (see e.g., Kosmützky et al., 2020): both countries represent the Nordic countries and are active members of the EHEA. Both countries have a similar educational value base, although there are observable national differences in their implementation. The purpose of the comparison is to highlight not only the similarities inherent in hybridity but also the differences stemming from national contexts.

The data consists of 16 interviews and seven documents. Of the interviews, nine were conducted online and seven on site. Seven interviewees were from Finnish higher education institutions and seven from Swedish higher education institutions, representing staff with strategic responsibility for IHEC (e.g., heads of international affairs) or, in two cases, responsible for coordinating student mobility (e.g., international coordinators). Two interviewees represented national higher education authorities (one from Finland and one from Sweden). The interviews with the Swedish participants were conducted in English, while those with the Finnish participants were conducted in Finnish. The latter interviews helped to clarify national contexts and are used as part of the analysis to refine the country-specific contexts reflected in the HEIS' responses.

Both the choice of language and the professional status of the interviewees may have influenced how the issues were discussed, or which aspects were emphasised in the interviews. At the same time, different professional roles may have overlapped in a crisis where the situation was 'ongoing' and there was sometimes a need to react without well thought out instructions. The choice of language was primarily pragmatic: on the one hand, it is natural to use one's mother tongue in interviews, and on the other, the interviewees' working language is predominantly English, so it was assumed that they were used to using it naturally for self-expression.

The transcribed interviews were analysed using reflective thematic analysis guided by qualitative abductive logic (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). This approach considered assumptions identified in previous research on Finnish higher education institutions (Juusola & Nokkala, 2024).

It was assumed that the war in Ukraine particularly affected the institutional mobility goals of Finnish higher education institutions, which may have been emphasised in the interviews. However, the thematic analysis approached the transcribed data with curiosity, aiming to identify broader, shared meanings presented by different HEI representatives through detailed observations (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). This guided the exploration of responses to the war in Ukraine in IHEC activities, with a focus on moral responsibility and the pursuit of the common good.

Seven documents were added to the data, based on themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data. These documents provided a national perspective, for example when discussing the termination of institutional collaboration with Russian higher education institutions. Four of the documents represent Finland and three Sweden, all from the ministries responsible for higher education and the national education authorities. These documents clarify the national position on higher education in response to the war in Ukraine. Although the document and interview data are not exhaustive, they allow this study to examine the dynamics of 'nested hybridity' at different levels within two national contexts and to highlight key moral justifications associated with the geopolitically uncertain situation.

5 Findings

The findings from the reflective thematic data analysis were structured according to the three levels of nested hybridity (Pekkola et al., 2022; 2020), encompassing national contexts, organisational strategic responses and the role of IHEC as work in the first year of the war. This approach allows an examination of the moral justifications (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) of nested hybridity not only across levels, but also as a country-specific comparison. Overall, the findings reveal a shared sense of fatigue with successive crises. Just as the challenges of the pandemic had been overcome and international activities were beginning to return to routine with a focus on promoting mobility rather than managing restrictions, the war in Ukraine forced a reassessment of IHEC activities from a new perspective. For HEIs, this meant dealing with a changed geopolitical landscape with no previous experience of a similar situation.

5.1 *National Responses to the War in Ukraine in the Context of IHEC*

The Russian invasion of Ukraine ultimately led to the freezing of collaboration with Russian higher education and research institutions in both Finland and Sweden. Statements issued by the respective national ministries and authorities responsible for education emphasised recommendations to suspend

institutional collaboration with Russian and Belarusian higher education and research institutions, while expressing solidarity with Ukraine (MINEDU, 2022a; Swedish Research Council, 2022). In both countries, the suspension of collaboration took place relatively soon after the Russian attack, in March 2022. However, Sweden issued an official statement on the matter before Finland and before the European Commission's decision to suspend collaboration under, for example, the Horizon Europe research funding framework (European Commission, 2022). This timing potentially has been influenced by the fact that, according to statistics on student mobility (ESF, 2024; NAE, 2023a; SCS, 2024) and interviews conducted, Finland had more strategic collaboration with Russia, which may have required more deliberation.

Both Finland and Sweden underlined at national level that the suspension of institutional collaboration was aimed at organisations rather than individuals (MINEDU, 2022a; Swedish Research Council, 2022). The countries also emphasised the principle of non-discrimination, stressing that no one should be discriminated against on the basis of nationality within higher education and research communities. Such principles reflect Nordic values of equality, while at the same time addressing national security concerns and wartime protection policies were seen important. Finland's national statements on education also emphasised the possibility of continuing to recruit international students regardless of their nationality (MINEDU, 2022b).

In both Finland and Sweden, new funding mechanisms were launched to support Ukrainian education and facilitate the relocation of Ukrainian students and researchers. Part of this funding has been allocated through European Union programmes such as Erasmus+, with a stronger focus on supporting students coming from Ukraine (NAE, 2023b). In addition, national funding programmes have been set up to promote various forms of collaboration with Ukrainians, including strengthening Ukrainian educational institutions and improving their reconstruction capacities (Ministry of Education and Research, 2023; NAE, 2023c).

When interpreting national education and science policy approaches to international higher education collaboration (IHEC) in the context of the war in Ukraine, moral justifications are primarily based on domestic considerations emphasising security policy concerns regarding the suspension of institutional collaboration with Russian actors. On the other hand, national politics also extended solidarity to Ukraine in general and stressed importance of non-discrimination at individuals. These justifications are analytically consistent with a civic convention indicating social responsibility and solidarity. There are no significant differences between Finland and Sweden in terms of the moral justifications behind these actions; both countries had similar justification for legitimising their policies. However, the Finnish Ministry of Education

provided more detailed information to the public for higher education institutions, for example in relation to student admissions, probably reflecting the broader scope of its previous collaboration with Russia (MINEDU, 2022b; Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2023).

5.2 *Re-Consideration of IHEC Institutional Strategies*

As the war in Ukraine began, IHEC activities were beginning to stabilise and, in many ways, a gradual return to freer post-pandemic international mobility was underway. This was also evident in the interviews, as HEIs in both countries anticipated a return to the 'new normal'. However, the war in Ukraine further complicated these efforts by creating now geopolitical uncertainties, especially in Europe, and posing new kinds of testing situations (Boltanski, 2011).

Indeed, the war required Finnish HEIs in particular, which had well-established institutional collaboration with Russian higher education institutions, not only to freeze such collaboration, but also to reconsider their strategic partnerships and the principles on which they were based, while at the same time showing strong solidarity with Ukraine. One respondent described the situation as follows:

This (war) felt like an incredibly unfair burden after COVID-19, when I thought the world was opening up and we could start building a future full of hope and meeting colleagues and acquaintances. We had such strong, diverse and natural international relations with Russia, all over Russia, and now they've been cut off. I think it was devastating.

PARTICIPANT 8, Finnish HEI

This quote is also an example of the nationally embedded differences in Finnish and Swedish HEIs on the war in Ukraine, as interpreted through the interviews. Finnish HEIs reflected a dual focus: both the abandonment of strategic partnerships and collaboration with Russia, and the adoption of new initiatives towards Ukraine. When asked about the impact of the war, representatives of Swedish HEIs mainly emphasised initiatives to support Ukraine, although some institutions had some student mobility (exchange and study) from Russia to Sweden and research-based collaboration. At the same time, however, mobility from a warzone is not easy, and the number of arrivals from Ukraine has not been large, as one respondent noted:

We had supported them [Ukrainian students] so they could stay for another year, but those were the people who were here a year ago, and then we had only few more students from Ukraine.

PARTICIPANT 4, Swedish HEI

The participant from both of the countries underscored the importance of ethical considerations in selecting strategic partnerships with responsibility, as stated by one of the respondent:

Of course, also in international activities, the goal is to consider and assess where and how, and on what grounds actions are taken, so that we can be responsible actors.

PARTICIPANT 9, Finnish HEI

with some participants contemplating the potential for enhanced European collaboration, possibly extending to the Nordic region. From this perspective, strategic development is closely tied to European collaboration and initiatives that impact the entire European Higher Education Area (EHEA), such as the European Universities Initiative. It was also noted that strategic partnerships are influenced by the global geopolitical context and the varying priorities of major education actors, such as China. Consequently, strategic re-consideration is not merely a local matter but is deeply connected to national contexts, geopolitical tensions, Europeanization, and the broader global situation.

From the perspective of reality testing and moral justification, the war in Ukraine fundamentally disrupted established norms and expectations, particularly for Finnish HEIs. It also necessitated a systematic re-evaluation of ethical principles and crisis awareness in reformulating IHE strategies. This re-evaluation was partially justified through industrial conventions emphasising transparency and systemic thinking, domestic conventions emphasising (national) security concerns, and civic conventions highlighting social responsibility toward Ukrainians. Simultaneously, strategic rethinking also involved the consideration of prospective scenarios, suggesting elements of a prospective convention (Ye & Nylander, 2024) and potential outcomes. Within this framework, global responsibility plays a role, albeit with certain limitations. Similar observations have been documented in earlier research (Juusola & Nokkala, 2024).

5.3 *Reassessing IHEC as Work: Navigating Solidarity and Global Tensions*

Based on the interviews, the war in Ukraine had an impact on the practical work of IHEC, requiring the reconsidering of exchange arrangements, the consideration of the sensitivity of events and the reassessment of personal professional relationships. These reflections illustrated different dimensions of solidarity and the visibility of global tensions in everyday work.

In interviews with both Finnish and Swedish HEIs' representatives, two key themes emerged: on the one hand, the desire to support Ukrainian students

and researchers in moving to Sweden or Finland and, on the other hand, to ensure that no one was discriminated against in higher education communities on the basis of their background. Helping Ukrainians was understandably emphasised and as mentioned above, pre-existing personal relationships were beneficial in this context. In practice, implementing institutional mobility processes without strong partnerships can be challenging, especially in a war-torn country. On the other hand, as noted by a representative of a Swedish HEIs, international collegial solidarity initiatives such as ‘Scholars at Risk’ also provided a way to reach Ukrainians.

At the same time, participants emphasised solidarity with all members of the higher education community, including colleagues based in Russia. This was particularly relevant for representatives from Finnish HEIs as in Finnish HEIs initially had more students or staff from Russia and had actively collaborated with Russian institutions in both education and research. The interviews in both countries also revealed that geopolitical and global tensions had existed before the war in Ukraine, but had not necessarily received similar attention. The war in Ukraine brought these tensions to the fore, leading, for example, to a re-evaluation of how international student orientations were organised and whether it was necessary to highlight nationalities at such events, as one respondent stated:

Like we receive one student from Ukraine and then one student from Lithuania, but original nationality was Belarus. Okay, so then I was wondering if, like, usually, when, when we organise an orientation program, I tended to show the like the world map to show like student diversity, but now, should I use the same method or some other practicality? This complexity changed our preparation, or routine to some extent.

PARTICIPANT 5, Swedish HEI

In the practical work of IHE, the test situations were particularly connected to questions of community, social, and global responsibility, where previous practices, such as orientations, had to be reassessed in a new reality – considering “what is” and “what could be” (Boltanski, 2011). In IHEC work, the civic convention, emphasizing solidarity, and the domestic convention, highlighting traditional trust and security, were particularly prominent as foundations for justification at both national and organisational levels (Imdorf & Leemann, 2023). In addition, IHEC work reveals elements of the inspirational convention (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Imdorf & Leemann, 2023), which in this context can be described as morally inspired action. This includes the willingness of

individual actors to help, engage in collegial goodwill, and utilize their personal networks. Through these personal contacts, targeted connections were established with students and researchers in Ukraine.

6 Conclusion

In this research, my aim was to examine the nested hybridity (Pekkola et al., 2020) and moral justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Imdorf & Leemann, 2023) of international higher education collaboration (IHEC) in Finland and Sweden in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I also explored whether these meanings differ or remain consistent across the two national contexts (Finland and Sweden). Through the study, a comprehensive understanding of IHEC emerged as a nested hybridity (Pekkola et al., 2020), where national policies, organisational strategic actions and practical operations are in dynamic interaction. However, this interaction requires the use of partly different emphases between Finland and Sweden and partly different justification frameworks at different levels of hybridity, reflecting both national characteristics and the specificities of the levels of hybridity.

In general, the findings highlighted the domestic convention, which emphasises national security and traditions, and the civic convention, which reflects solidarity and social responsibility (Imdorf & Leemann, 2020). The data also revealed elements of the industrial convention, which refers to uniformity, transparency, and standards, and the inspirational convention, which supports personal moral responsibility (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Imdorf & Leemann, 2020). However, when examining the different levels of nested hybridity, it can be noted that national education policies emphasised domestic conventions, particularly in relation to national security, trustfulness and the geopolitical positioning of Finland and Sweden in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Juusola & Nokkala, 2024). In both countries, national solidarity with Ukraine and equal treatment regardless of nationality were emphasized, which reflected the civic convention. However, compared to Sweden, in Finland, the situation of Russian students and researchers was somewhat more pronounced, where the industrial convention was highlighted, particularly in the processes that could be followed in this context, such as in student recruitment.

At the organisational (HEIs) level, the findings revealed a balancing act between different justifications. For example, industrial conventions were reflected in the formalisation of mobility processes and the re-evaluation of

institutional strategies and ethical guidelines, while civic and domestic conventions emphasized social responsibility within the higher education community and the need to ensure trust-based collaboration in the future. Reconsidering the geographical scope of strategic partnerships would be particularly relevant for Finnish higher education institutions, which had previously engaged in intensive institutional collaboration with Russian universities. This kind of approach indicates a prospective convention (Ye & Nylander, 2024).

At a practical level (IHEC as work), the civic convention was particularly evident in everyday actions. HEIS worked to create inclusive environments, re-evaluating practices such as orientation sessions to avoid discrimination on the basis of nationality. The domestic convention was also evident as institutions navigated the challenges of maintaining collaboration with Russian academics while addressing security concerns and ethical considerations. Inspirational conventions were demonstrated through individual acts of moral responsibility. HEIS' representatives relied on personal networks to facilitate links with Ukrainian students and researchers, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between formal structures and personal initiative.

This analysis indicates that crises underscore the hybrid nature of IHEC activities as a form of coordination that is adaptable to situations but challenging to manage (see also Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017). This is especially evident in uncertain situations where what is expected to be and what is no longer applies in the same way. In such cases, IHEC activities must be carried out considering situational specificity, while ensuring accountability to different stakeholders. At the same time, it can be argued that it is precisely this hybridity that enables the flexibility of IHEC activities, as they operate at different levels, in different areas, targeted at different stakeholder groups, and utilizing different funding bases. Thus, analytically speaking, the continuity of IHEC activities is based on their hybridity, although this also means that managing them is challenging.

There are also limitations to this study, such as the focus on specific national contexts which, despite sharing similar value bases, have unique cultural and political characteristics. For example, differences in the governance of higher education at the national level may have an impact on the comparative analysis. In addition, this study focuses on a short period of time, which may not capture the long-term effects of the war situation.

Further research could examine the hybridity of IHEC activities from the perspective of different spatiotemporal spaces, investigating which are manageable and which are not. The war in Ukraine provides an example of individual actors taking the initiative in the absence of institutional relationships. This may result in new openings in IHEC activities that are not reflected or recognized in the HEIS' strategies.

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Coping with Hybridity in Higher Education

The Impact of Digitalization on Teaching Practices

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Abstract

Digitalization is significantly intensifying hybridity in higher education (HE) by introducing new modes of collaboration, communication, and knowledge dissemination within academic environments. Digitalization also influences pedagogical approaches and instructional methodologies. Given this backdrop, this chapter asks: *How does digitalization amplify hybridization of academic teaching practices?* Focusing on Norwegian HE and using two universities as illustrative cases, we draw on theories of practice and an analytical framework with three perspectives, namely, tools and platforms, literacy and skills, and mindsets towards digital technologies and teaching. Our findings reveal that the adoption of digital platforms, evolving skills and requirements, and the rise of new professional groups, such as ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) experts and institution-wide pedagogical units, are fundamentally reshaping the landscape of academic work, particularly in terms of teaching and professional identities. This shift is driving the emergence of new, digitally mediated practices, contributing to processes of de- and re-institutionalization. These changes are likely to have significant structural effects on HE in the mid- to long-term.

Keywords

digitalization – hybridization – learning – pedagogy – practices – teaching

1 Introduction

Digitalization, referring to the adoption of digital tools and platforms affecting the ways in which professional groups and organisations interact with each other (Pinheiro et al., 2023, p. 5), plays a significant role in intensifying the hybridization of academic work. It does so by offering new modes and

platforms for communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing within academic environments (Pinheiro et al., 2023; Kerruish, 2024). Within teaching, digitalization has affected pedagogical approaches and instructional methodologies. The widespread adoption of learning management systems or LMS (de Andrade et al., 2023), digital content repositories, and interactive multimedia resources (Barman & Weurlander, 2023) has transformed the role of the educator from a traditional disseminator of knowledge to a facilitator of (online) learning experiences (Tømte et al., 2020; Scherer et al., 2021).

Concepts such as ‘digitisation’ and ‘digitalisation’ are often used interchangeably, yet they have different connotations. For example, digitisation refer to the process of converting analogue information into digital form (e.g., written notes into binary code) for storage, processing, and transmission using ICT tools. Digitalisation refers to how digital tools and platforms change social and organizational interactions, such as moving from traditional mail to email, and includes trends like automation (Pinheiro et al., 2023).

In this digital pedagogical landscape, teachers are to create teaching materials, design lesson plans that suit conventional campus students as well as online students, design and create content for learning management platforms communicate with students, peers, and administrative staff on diverse digital platforms. Moreover, these distinct knowledge domains blend and merge into new types of academic teaching. We may interpret this transformation as a form of hybridization, where the traditional, lecture-room centred, discipline-guided academic teaching is being added to and blended with various digitalized elements. What is more, there is an ongoing pedagogical turn from teacher-led instruction towards student active teaching, which is being aided by digital technologies (Børte et al., 2023). As a result, we propose a new hybridized form of teaching practices, which will be further explored in this chapter.

From a conceptual standpoint, and as suggested by Johansson and Vakkuri (2017), hybridity refers to an “impure existence between pure types”. More specifically, according to Kim et al. (2016, p. 430), hybridity at the level of organizational practices refers to a practice that “distinctly differs from any existing pure practices yet still retains the key (core) features of two or more of the existing pure practices”. Moving from an organisational to an individual perspective, practice may refer to routinized types of behaviour that consist of several interconnected elements, including forms of bodily activities, mental activities, things, and their use, background knowledge, and emotions (Reckwitz, 2002; Nicolini, 2012). As will be explored in this chapter, the multitude of practices teachers are to cope with originates from various fields of expertise other than their disciplines, leading to new constellations of

‘something old, something new, and something borrowed’. What is more, as will be further explored, various digital technologies may influence both the discipline and its didactics, along with generic pedagogical perspectives. Finally, given the largely individualised nature of the teaching profession, it is important to acknowledge that academics exercise significant autonomy and agency in shaping and developing their own teaching practices. These practices are influenced, for instance, by their prior experiences (including socialisation), normative and strategic preferences, and local circumstances (see e.g., Oleson & Hora, 2014).

In this chapter our aim is to further investigate how academic staff both perceive and adapt to changes in their teaching practices caused by various digital technologies, and how this relates to hybridity. We ask: *How does digitalization amplify hybridization of academic teaching practices?* Empirically, the chapter draws on a sample composed of two higher education institutions (HEIs) in Norway, HEI A and HEI B.

In the next section we clarify the relationship between hybridisation and academic work, followed by a short exposition of key dynamics within Norwegian HE. Sections 4 and 5 illuminate on the study’s theoretical, methodological and analytical underpinnings, before the presentation of key findings and a conclusive discussion.

2 Intensifying Hybridization of Academic Work

Earlier research reports on several changes of transformations in academic work, roles, and practices. Consequently, there appears to be a far-reaching consensus in HE studies that the traditional boundaries around the roles and practices of academic staff have become increasingly blurred and blended with positions and tasks that were previously considered to belong under the responsibility of university administration. Among the academic staff at universities, administrative workloads associated with organizing and reporting of teaching and research activities are expanding. This development is driven by various parallelly impacting forces both within and outside academia, including shifting educational paradigms (Tømte et al., 2019; Pugacheva et al., 2020), interdisciplinary research pursuits (Pinheiro et al., 2023), and political pressures towards increased accountability and efficiency (Rampelt et al., 2020; Beerkens, 2022).

Within the context of European HE, earlier studies on transformation of academic work range from shedding light on key aspects such as teaching quality (McInnis, 2000), leadership and management of HEIs (Henkel, 2002;

De Boer et al., 2010), competition of HEIs (Kettunen et al., 2022; Alajoutsijärvi et al., 2024), change agents (Doring, 2002), professional-development (Brew & Bound, 2006; Teräs, 2016) and identity (Clark et al., 2012; Winter, 2009), gender and feminization (Drudy, 2008), third space professionals (Whitchurch, 2008), the impact of policy reforms on working conditions (Santiago & Carvalho, 2008), and entrepreneurialism (Wright, 2007).

More recently, salient research topics include incentive and promotion systems (Pietilä, 2019), staff composition (Stage, 2020), social impact (Avramovic et al., 2022) and engagement (Perkmann et al., 2021), alongside emerging topics like 'the Uberisation of scientific work' (Carvalho et al., 2022), task formalization (Avramovic, 2024), the rise of new, non-academic change agents (Stage & de Jong, 2023), invisible (scholarly) boundaries (Siekinen et al., 2022), and the effects of COVID-19 on academic practices and the 'psychological contract' (Alton et al., 2024; Solberg & Tømte, 2023; Nokkala et al., 2023).

Parallel with the above, assorted studies highlight the growing role of hybrids and hybridity of professions and professional work across public sector workplaces at large (for a review see Giacomelli, 2019). Within HE research, this includes accounts of academics as hybrid professionals – multiple roles, tasks, values, identities, and loyalties – who are deeply embedded in hybrid organizational settings (Jongbloed, 2015; Pekkola et al., 2022). These studies contribute to a better understanding of change and stability patterns within the contexts in which academic professionals operate, underpinned by change dynamics at the societal, organizational, and disciplinary levels (cf. Leisyte et al., 2023; Pinheiro et al., 2023).

As noted, the studies that highlight hybrids and hybridization of academic work and of professions in the public sector workplace touch upon many dilemmas, perspectives, and angles that seek to illuminate and frame the nature of hybridity. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, less has been said to date on how academic practices are becoming hybrid(ised) due to various digital technologies and how (key mechanisms) this is happening. This chapter aims to further explore this perspective by looking at academic teaching practices in a Nordic context, a part of the world where HE sector has experienced considerable structural changes and pressures towards digital innovations in recent years.

Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant catalyst for increasing hybridity in HE, driving a cultural shift towards remote work and distance studies, and enhancing academics' digital competencies. Post-pandemic, the integration of digital technology into traditional classroom teaching has become normalized and is now widely expected by policymakers, institutional leaders, and students (Hill & Smith, 2023; Imran et al., 2023). At the same time,

hybrid teaching aligns with broader policy objectives of promoting flexibility and accessibility, facilitating life-long learning through adaptable formats for diverse learner groups (Pinheiro et al., 2023). HEIs have thus transitioned from “either-or” approaches – offering either fully physical or fully online programs – to “both-and” models, where blending digital elements into traditional on-campus teaching has become an established norm (Solberg & Tømte, 2023). We argue that this institutionalized hybridity has also given rise to a new professional group of ICT experts, whose growing influence will continue to shape institutional priorities, academic practices and the division of labour in the years to come.

Moreover, studies following the COVID-19 pandemic show that existing national governmental initiatives on digitalisation have either been challenged – or further expanded by international trends recognized as ‘platformisation’ of HEIs, where a small number of supranational/international edtech companies offer digital infrastructures recognized as platforms for teaching and learning, along with administration and research (Ivancheva & Garvey, 2022).

In this digital pedagogical landscape, academic staff members often assume multifaceted (‘hybrid’) roles, serving as content creators, instructional designers, and online community moderators, thereby blurring the traditional boundaries between teaching and technological expertise. The transition to distance mode during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has been reported to have resulted in a variety of responses from the academic staff that have handled the changes differently, leading to a renegotiation of one’s professional identity when confronted with new expectations and demands (*cf.* Viberg et al., 2023).

While several digital learning platforms were implemented already before the pandemic within HEIs in Norway and elsewhere, their capacity for data-driven governance issues has raised several, pressing issues of concern among scholars and policymakers alike after the pandemic (Mavroudi, 2023; Cobo & Rivas, 2023). As a result, scholarly and policy debates regarding regulations concerning privacy issues and overall challenges related to governance, surveillance, and algorithmic control have intensified. It remains yet unanswered how these transformations may, over time, influence our understanding of teaching and learning practices at HEIs (Cobo & Rivas, 2023; de Andrade et al., 2023).

3 Digitalization in Norwegian Higher Education

With few exceptions, most Norwegian HEIs are state funded. Like their counterparts in other Nordic countries, Norwegian HEIs hold an autonomous status, yet their governments consider them as socially responsible institutions

meant to tackle future challenges (Kallo & Välimaa, 2025). For more than a decade, the Norwegian government has initiated and financially supported diverse initiatives for bringing digitalization into HE. These activities' primary aims have been to, first, support and enhance the quality of teaching and learning and, second, to promote, facilitate, and improve research and administration of HEIs. The current national strategy on digitalization targeting HEIs emphasizes the need for change to be able to benefit from digital technologies in teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2021). The strategy recommends a comprehensive approach towards digital technologies and the incorporation of digitalization into institutional quality work. Student active teaching and learning eased by digital technologies, as well as Artificial Intelligence (AI), represent the recent amendments to the national level policy documents (Ministry of Education, 2021), which are gradually incorporated into HEI-level strategies.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed that the current digital infrastructure within and across HEIs in Norway was robust and capable to adequately support online teaching during campus lockdowns (Solberg & Tømte, 2023). Yet, the pandemic also revealed great variations in how this so-called 'emergency remote online teaching' (Hodges, 2020) was designed and implemented within and across disciplines, and across HEIs (Solberg & Tømte, 2023). A key finding was that while academic staff learned how to master basic online communications, via broadcasting lectures on Zoom and similar technologies, fewer reported having permanently changed their teaching methods after the pandemic. It seems the focus was primarily on the technical aspects, with limited systematic attention to adapting teaching methods, approaches and epistemologies (Solberg & Tømte, 2023).

Today, all Norwegian HEIs offer support to their academic staff on teaching and digital technologies. Typically, these include various support centres and units (e.g., centres for teaching and learning, media centres), courses (e.g., university pedagogics), and a new cadre of in-house professionals (e.g., experts, course facilitators, and 'super-users' of different digital platforms and software) that operate under the HEIs' central administration and are meant to serve all faculties and programs across different fields and disciplines. It has also become common practice amongst certain HEIs with little in-house capacity to resort to a wide variety of external (largely technical) experts. This development forms a trend observed across European HEIs, including an institutionalisation of staff development in terms of the systematic integration of supports and incentives, and situating staff development within a broader strategy or vision (O'Mahony et al., 2025, p. 5).

Moreover, in Norway as across Europe, the (US dominated) EdTech platform providers are gaining ground within HEIs, and their platforms influence how teachers may interact with students and manage their teaching practices, often requiring adaptation to new technologies and methodologies (Komlejonvic et al., 2024).

4 Practice Theory and Its Relevance to University Teaching in Digitalized Environments

Practice theory, originating from the works of scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and more recently Theodore Schatzki, has appeared as a significant framework for understanding social practices. Central to practice theory is the idea that social life is constituted by a series of practices – routinized types of behaviour that consist of several interconnected elements, including forms of bodily activities, mental activities, things, and their use, background knowledge, and emotions (Reckwitz, 2002; Nicolini, 2012). This perspective shifts the analytical focus from individual actors and structures to the everyday practices through which both are constituted and transformed. In the context of education, practice theory offers a lens to examine the dynamic interplay between the actions of teachers, the material and digital tools and resources they use, and the broader socio-cultural environment in which they work.

For example, the concept of *habitus* refers to habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals have due to their life experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). In a digitalized university, teachers' habitus is influenced by their prior experiences with technology, their pedagogical philosophies, and the institutional culture. These factors collectively shape how they engage with digital tools and resources and integrate them into their teaching practices. In other words, a teacher with a strong background for instance in technology and a constructivist pedagogical approach may be more inclined to use interactive digital tools that promote student collaboration and active learning. Furthermore, Giddens' (1984) concept of structuration, which emphasizes the *duality of structure* – how structures are both the medium and outcome of practices – may also offer some valuable insights: In HEIs, the structures of teaching (such as curricula, assessment methods, and institutional policies) are both shaped by and shape the digital practices of teachers. For instance, institutional policies on the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning (hereafter T&L) may influence the extent to which teachers adopt certain technologies, while teachers' innovative use of digital tools and resources can, in turn, lead to changes in

these policies. Moreover, Schatzki's (2002) concept of the 'site of the social' underscores the importance of spatial and material arrangements in the constitution of practices. In HEIs, the virtual space of online classrooms, the materiality of digital devices, and the affordances of digital tools and resources play a crucial role in shaping teaching practices. The physical absence of students from the traditional classroom setting necessitates new forms of interaction and engagement, eased by the digital medium. Teachers must navigate this altered spatiality, finding ways to create a sense of presence and community in a virtual environment.

Consequently, within the framework of practice theory, the activities of university teachers in a digitalized environment can be viewed as complex practices that are continually reconstituted through their engagement with digital tools and resources, institutional norms, and student interactions. For instance, the use of LMS, video conferencing tools, and digital collaboration platforms stands for more than just the adoption of recent technologies; as will be further explored here, it involves reconfiguring teaching practices. Teachers must develop new capabilities, adapt their pedagogical strategies, and negotiate new roles and identities within the digital classroom. We may also see this development in the light of the hybridity of organizational practices (Kim et al., 2016). As will be elaborated in the present chapter, the reconfiguration of organizational practices that relate to teaching draws on existing and emerging teaching practices, all becoming influenced by digital technologies. Practice theory will here serve as a lens of interpretation of the analysis, and this perspective will be further elaborated in the discussion-part of the chapter.

5 Data, Methodology, and Analytical Approach

The study adopts a qualitative, case study research design with data collected at two Norwegian universities of distinct size and varied institutional profiles, one of the institutions being an older and more traditional comprehensive university, the other holding a more regional profile and offering professional education programs (e.g., teacher education, engineering, nursing). A total of 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the winter of 2023 with a purposive sample of strategically selected academics responsible for coordinating BA and MA degree programs across several disciplinary fields: education, information systems, law, languages, health science, and biology (Creswell, 2014). The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, recorded, transcribed verbatim, and later translated to English using professional AI-based transcription and translation tool. The Authors then continued the transcription and translation processes in several rounds to ensure the accuracy of transcription.

5.1 *Analytical Framework*

As a point of departure in this study, we use the term digital transformations (DTs) in HE to refer to the growing importance of digital/online platforms that create new requirements for digital skills and literacy for academic staff with teaching and assessment responsibilities. Even though DTs can refer to much wider, multi-level processes of change and adaptation involving a variety of mechanisms and actors (Pinheiro et al., 2023), we pay particular attention to the following three dimensions of DTs (see Figure 8.1) that we argue play a key role in intensifying the hybridization of teaching practices at HEIS:

1. *Tools and platforms* refer to the adoption and diffusion of a wide variety of digital and web-based learning management and educational tools and platforms in the context of T&L. In Norway, these include proprietary systems such as Canvas, Moodle and Inpera, in addition to tools dedicated to content development and web-based instruction and collaboration or LMS.
2. *Literacy and skills* are associated with the development of dedicated pedagogical and methodological approaches that encompass the specific contexts in which T&L occur within digital and technologically mediated environments (cf. Tømte & Lazareva, 2023; for a recent review see Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2022).
3. *Mindsets* pertain to the types of culturally induced adaptations (academic norms, values, traditions, identities, epistemologies, etc.) resulting from the adoption and prevalence of digitally mediated tools and platforms alongside digital skills and competencies (Hermansen & Lund, 2023; Øvrelid et al., 2023, pp. 56–57).

Turning now to the micro level (agentic) dimensions associated to T&L, three analytical aspects associated with the DT-related (macro) dimensions sketched out above are worth investigating, namely:

- a. *Curriculum content and delivery*, encompassing elements related to new forms of remote instruction and blended learning alongside the devising of new learning spaces beyond the traditional (physical) classroom setting (Tømte & Lazareva, 2023).
- b. *Pedagogical methods and approaches* (including assessment), referring to a rethinking of existing student competencies and learning outcomes that consider, inter alia, “students’ digital competence and previous experiences of using various IT (Information Technology) systems” (Barman & Weurlander, 2023, p. 162).
- c. *Norms and values* of academic staff, refer to the effects of DTs in epistemic practices across different disciplinary settings (Lund & Aagaard, 2020).

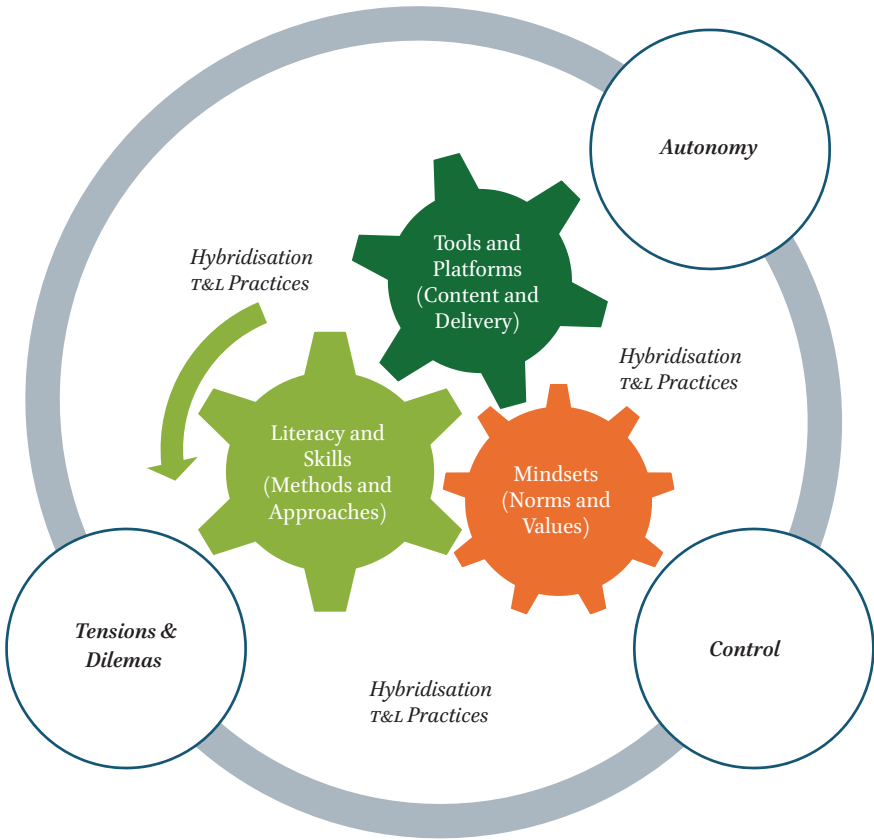


FIGURE 8.1 Analytical model for operationalization of teaching practices

In terms of the broader agentic mechanisms associated with the effects of DTs in academic practices, three aspects are worth considering as referring to the importance associated with shifts in (a) work-related autonomy, (b) degrees of control over one’s work, and (c) tensions, dilemmas and trade-offs generated by the co-existence of old and new logics practices and imperatives.

In what follows is a thematical analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) of the qualitative interview data according to the above presented three dimensions and sub-dimensions of DTs; (a) tools and platforms (content and delivery), (b) literacy and skills, methods and approaches, and (c) mindsets (norms and values). This includes a theory-driven code generation process where data has been identified according to the dimensions, which then have generated the basis for definition of themes.

6 Digital Transformations of Teaching Practices – Presentation of Findings

6.1 *Tools and Platforms – Content and Delivery*

Academic staff at both institutions studied, HEI A and B, report on digitalization-driven changes in their teaching. These changes include academic teaching staff being expected to manage, daily, an increasing number of diverse digital tools and platforms; for communication with students, providing lectures, organizing assignment deliveries, and assessing assignments and exams. The platforms for lecturing enable teaching both online and in traditional physical classrooms, sometimes in both digital and physical space simultaneously, in a so-called hybrid teaching format (Baker & Spencerly, 2023). Often, teachers are also expected to produce video recordings of their teaching and to include these videos as resources for students' learning (Noetel et al., 2021). At HEI A, one study program manager from biology elaborates as follows:

It's a mixture of web-based teaching and physical teaching. We use that in a way that we either make videos ourselves, or we use what's on YouTube, which is a demonstration of exercises that you do in the lab. This way, students are better prepared when they come to the lab, and they can spend their time there more effectively.

However, significant variations exist in teachers' enthusiasm to engage in recent technologies and pedagogical approaches, and despite the post-pandemic 'hype' of the possibilities of digitalization, permanent changes and adjustments to teaching practices appear as rather modest. At the program management level, the adoption of digital technologies seems to create comparisons (and possibly also competition) among faculties and programs adopting digital technologies in teaching and learning. At HEI B, a study program manager in health sciences highlighted:

We [teachers at unit] have probably not been the most active users of videos. I think at the faculty level, there are several who have used a lot of videos. We have probably not been the ones who have used it the most. Instead, we streamed lectures online.

In terms of content and delivery of teaching, it is thus likely that both are influenced by digital technologies, enabling various possibilities and modes for teaching and learning.

6.1.1 Autonomy and Control in the HE-Platform Landscape: Winners and Losers of Flexible Solutions

In addition to multiple modes of content and delivery caused by digital technologies, a key observation across the two case HEIs relates to the flexibility in time, space, and delivery mode caused by digital technologies (Fevolden & Tømte, 2015). These types of flexibility also allow for various forms of hybridity in teaching practices. For example, teachers may bring in external experts to class by online participation. This may bring updated knowledge to the students, and they may interact with these experts and learn from participating in an online dialogue with them in class. A study program manager at HEI B (health sciences) elaborates on this:

It [online participation] has given a greater room for action to get in [external] experts in an area that you normally would not have had the money to travel to.

Following this, study program managers at both HEIs suggest that the transformation of teaching practices in terms of time, space, and modality are providing students with better learning opportunities, since the teachers are reaching out to them in several ways. They do so by using different digital technologies in campus-based teaching, by offering online services to them, and by communicating knowledge and subject-specific curriculum across multiple media. Furthermore, online platforms and digital tools enable students to engage in learning beyond the traditional classroom. Virtual classrooms, e-learning modules, and recorded lectures provide flexibility in how and when students access educational content. This way digital technologies have made the curricula not only more accessible to students but have also increased teachers' flexibility to deliver their lectures, less dependent on physical locations and time zones. All parties can now access a wealth of academic resources, research materials, and educational content online, breaking down geographical barriers.

We [teachers] can choose freely and now we have all kinds of options from the quite simple ones, so you just must record from PowerPoint and not even see the speaker, just hear a voice. To very professional videos that we can make via distinct software. (HEI B, Law)

Moreover, digital technologies were found to ease flexible assessment procedures for teachers, students, and study coordinators alike. Teachers can evaluate assignments and provide feedback on student performance, while also managing administrative tasks at their convenience.

Our students are found at many separate places. So, we have digital guidance. We did not have that before the pandemic. So, that has allowed us to be able to follow the students a little more closely than we could before. (HEI B, Law)

At the same time, digital technologies are seen to blur the boundaries in teaching and assessment practices, easing communications between students and teachers, and these with other staff members too. When successful, students may be exposed to a variety of pedagogical practices supported by digital technologies, and they may interact with their teachers online, and independent of physical spaces. At HEI A, a study program manager (language) summarizes the hybridization of teaching practices caused by digital technologies as follows:

I think the winners are students. We [teachers] make things easier for them, everything is more accessible, we are more accessible, and there are fewer hoops they must jump through.

Nonetheless, while the students are seen by many as the overall winners, this raises the question: does that make teachers the losers? What is observed from the data is that hybridity in time, space, and delivery mode allowed by digital technologies in general, and by the platforms in particular, result in many teachers finding themselves constantly available and responding to various demands (e.g., student inquiries, grading, and reporting) around the clock. At HEI A, one study program manager highlighted that being an online teacher requires higher levels of self-discipline to be able to regulate the work-life balance and not end up being accessible for students far beyond regular working hours.

Now it's online 24 hours a day. I don't feel that it's imposed. It's not the employer who demands that I answer all the time. It's more self-imposed. If they [students] know that this post is there, and I can answer now, or I can wait until the weekend, then I answer now. Then it can quickly spin out of control. (HEI A, Teacher Education)

6.2 *Literacy and Skills*

6.2.1 Teaching Methods and Approaches

Across the two HEIs studied, we found a limited reach of institutional support and incentives for mastering the various digital software and platforms that were adopted by their respective institutions and available to teachers. More specifically, the interviews revealed that even when training courses for digital

tools and platforms are offered to the faculty, very few prioritized attending any voluntary training sessions. In most cases, it was the early adopters and those more intrinsically interested in new digital technologies who signed up for these courses, while those less interested remained absent. While the reasons for not participating in such training can vary widely (and are largely outside the scope of this study), we found that the impact of attending the training was heightened by the fact that once a decision was made at the institutional level to adopt a new tool or software, little room was left for user-driven improvements. Rather than being user-friendly, these systems were often perceived as 'beta versions' that teachers were forced to use but could not do so effectively without taking the courses, reading manuals, or relying on administrative support. Our analysis suggests that digital literacy is not merely about technical proficiency but may also serve to reinforce hierarchies between those who master these technologies and those who choose to opt out. While some teachers can adapt to the new digital practices, many report either a lack of or limited digital competence, struggling to meet the new expectations and demands.

[...] the more complex it is, the narrower the field you can be good at. You must come up with a general skill, and you must have breadth, but also a lot of depth. So, you must choose where you want to be good at. (HEI B, Law)

6.2.2 Autonomy and Control of Digital Platforms and Software – Or Just Feeling Lost in Digital Transformations?

The increasing number of platforms and software available to teachers may allow a multitude of pedagogical possibilities. Yet, on the other hand, it may also become overwhelming, in that teachers do neither understand the distinct pedagogical potential for each of the products, nor its limitations. One of the informants elaborates on the frustration of having access to too many platforms, digital resources, and products:

The challenge is not to have too many similar or related products. Especially if one subject uses Kahoot, Padlet, and so on, and then you have Socrates, the students get confused. So, I think that if we could have a kind of unified 5–6-platform, at hand that covers the needs, then it is easier to have transfer value from one teacher to another. (HEI A, Teacher Education)

As noted from the above informant, teachers rarely had the time and capacity to learn to master all the platforms, software, and products for teaching purposes. Furthermore, what makes the application of these even more

complicated in real teaching situations is that teaching is sometimes peer-teaching, where different teachers use multiple tools, platforms, and resources.

Mastering the digital technologies and tools was a challenge even for the study program managers. Being academic staff members themselves, study program managers also have an administrative role, for instance, to access and follow up on various statistics related to student numbers, progression, and drop-out rates. Due to these expectations, study program managers often felt themselves responsible for being the advocates and role models in the mastery of digital tools.

[...] there are systems like Tableau. It took a long time before I dared to try to find something there. So, it was administrative support, the study program manager, who recommended that I find some information and statistics in Tableau. Tableau was there for a reason. I didn't even have access. So, first, I had to figure out how to get access to Tableau. Then I got a user profile, and it was a user limit that was completely hopeless. So, I had to ask her, who is not an IT or information system expert, but who has used the systems a lot, how to find access here. And that is an interesting paradox. (HEI A, information systems)

The above citation points to the blurred boundaries between teachers and administrators when it comes to management and digital competence in mastering administrative systems, software, and platforms. As indicated, the complexity of the tools involved calls for local experts of the system itself more than generic information system competence. In other words, a platform, system, or software designed for a certain purpose and a group of users may turn out to be difficult and unintuitive to use even for those who are experts in IT or information systems. In this respect, it could be argued that the so-called *new experts* are thus the experts of the system, software, or platform itself, with very little or no connection to the knowledge domain in which the system was designed to support in the first place. This, we argue, is an example of the hybridization of expertise caused by digital technologies.

6.3 *Mindsets*

6.3.1 Personal Interests in Digital Technologies across Generations

Hybridity effects may present dilemmas when university teachers face challenging decisions about how to balance or prioritize conflicting elements within the hybrid system. A key observation across the two HEIs is that the literacy and skills needed for purposeful use of digital technologies relate to personal interests towards digital technologies more than the age of the academic staff per se, as suggested here:

Among colleagues, I don't think it is age-specific, it is more about personality, who is used to changes, who is willing to change, and who is not. I can have two colleagues, both in their 50s, one of them jumps on every new wave, and is very much in, while the other says, no, I have done this for 20 years, I won't change. So, it is not necessarily age, and not necessarily experience either. It is true that it correlates a little, that those who have been in the profession longer, tend to not want to change, while those who are younger adapt a little faster. But that is not a rule. I have very conservative young colleagues too. So, it is very much personal. (HEI B, Law)

6.3.2 Time Investments to Become Digitally Competent

Decisions related to resource allocation, strategy, or design can be dilemmatic. Some respondents elaborated on the time allocations required for learning about new digital tools and platforms, or even just to keep up with existing ones:

I've spent half of my working day trying to figure out how to do it. So, I must get into the new tool, instead of using a tool I already know. Right, that's the dilemma. You never get a satisfactory answer on how to solve it. I think it's the time that's the key. (HEI B, Law)

The same respondent further elaborates that:

The biggest challenge with the digitalization process is to have enough time. [...] There's a lot to get into, technically, especially in transition phases, with increased ambition, and the need to use more video. It takes a lot more time than you can formally give into the teaching. You have 50% teaching and 50% research, but with digitalization projects, you experience 100% teaching and no research, because it's so time-consuming. (HEI B, Law)

6.3.3 Tensions, Dilemmas, and Trade-Offs: Who Owns the Digital Teaching Resources?

Across the two HEIs concerns were expressed about intellectual property rights of the teaching materials. Teachers may produce videos, slides, and other support materials that they may share with students and peer teachers. They often upload these resources at a joint platform or just share it via e-mails and the like. As pointed out by several informants, these efforts are quite time-consuming, and not all teachers prioritize this type of work related to their

teaching. Moreover, among those who do so, there are several concerns, as suggested here:

Colleagues have just taken and used what I have made [teaching materials], without asking. Because it is just there, in a joint Canvas room. But I do not think that is okay. It is my work, it is my hours, and I am willing to share if you ask first. Okay. But to just take without asking, is stealing! And this difference here, has been wiped out a little bit with the digitalisation. (HEI A, Education)

While ownership over teaching materials becomes blurred, caused by digitalization that provides easy access to such resources, another, rather extreme concern relates to one's future employment prospects:

I have recorded [and uploaded] all my lectures, what could happen, is that someone could just download them from my Canvas room, or Panopto, and just use them, and kick me [out]. They [sub-unit] do not need me, because they have my lectures, right? (HEI A, Language)

When looking into what frames the mindsets of our informants across the disciplines, faculties and HEIs, a key observation is that personal interest in digital technologies, regardless of teachers' age or generational cohort, makes a major difference insofar teachers' approaches towards possibilities and challenges associated with the digitalisation of T&L. Nonetheless, while personal interests are important for professional development into digital competence, time allocation for this development is crucial. It is said that to become digital competent and to master all platforms, software, and products requires far more time than typically is available, which again forces teaching staff to prioritize among the available systems. From an institutional perspective, some severely blurred boundaries exist between ownership and control of the learning resources developed by the teachers. As shown, several informants expressed concerns about the intellectual property rights and the institutional preparedness to give proper recognition and credit for those who took part in the development of those resources.

7 Conclusive Discussion

By studying the practices through which teaching is enacted, this chapter illuminated the interconnections between teachers' actions, digital tools and resources, and the broader socio-cultural context. This allowed us to highlight

the adaptive and dynamic nature of teaching practices, emphasizing the continuous process of negotiation and reconstitution in response to the evolving digital landscape.

Through whitepapers, green papers, strategies, and national action plans external stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education and Research set the direction for HEIs' adoption of digital technologies for T&L, research, and administration. This process may be seen in line with Giddens' (1984) notion of *structuration*, which addresses structure both as the medium and the outcome of practices. In our study, salient external stakeholders, like the government and its agencies, seek to shape how teachers are expected to teach, in terms of pedagogical practices and their use of digital technologies and resources. That said, national guidelines do not address how digital technologies blur the boundaries between teachers and administrative staff, including ICT-experts; when teachers are to use the various digital platforms, software, and products.

External stakeholders such as edtech/platform/software providers contribute to the blurring of boundaries between the HEIs and the systems, both for profit-systems provided by the edtech-sectors and public systems developed by governmental agencies. This links back to unsolved problems regarding intellectual properties and privacy issues, such as who owns the data derived from the digital technologies. These developments were found to impact teaching practices and, subsequently, teachers' own professional roles more broadly; their role as experts of certain knowledge domains become challenged by ICT-experts of various kinds, e.g., ICT-staff, local university pedagogy units, edtech providers.

Moreover, the data suggests that teaching practices are increasingly shaped by digital technologies, and resisting this new 'norm' seems to require an ever more active or conscious decision to not participate, engage, or, for instance, directly refuse offering students the option for digital or hybrid participation, as well as self-regulating one's virtual office hours. The latter were found to either ease or limit teaching, depending on teachers' abilities (skills but also time constraints) to use digital technologies for pedagogical purposes. We may interpret this finding considering the concept of *habitus*, as outlined by Bourdieu (1977). As shown in the empirical section, teachers' culturally related attributes and mindsets associated with T&L were found to impact teachers' own capacities to embrace digital technologies in their daily teaching-related tasks.

That said, as relatively autonomous professionals, teachers were also found to have some degree of control or agency over the use of the digital tools. However, it is worth pointing out that some teachers hold the view that individuals – so called 'new experts' – lacking formal educational training in teaching are exerting high levels of control over academia because of the digitalization of T&L and of the entire HE system more broadly. Other teachers report a lack of

control in classroom teaching and interaction, as well as the usage of teaching materials by peers. These aspects point to the importance associated with spatial and material dimensions (structures) underpinning T&L practices (agency) within HEIS (Schatzki, 2002).

Our study thus reveals the *duality of control* between external and internal stakeholders (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010), highlighting the intricate balance between salient external and local actors in the adoption, adaptation and widespread diffusion (institutionalisation) of digital platforms, software, and products within HEIS. Moreover, it delves into the conflicts arising from the emerging *ambiguity* surrounding roles and responsibilities (Schulz, 2013; Avramovic, 2024) in addressing digital-related challenges, questioning whether such issues should be directed toward program managers, service providers, or teaching staff.

Additionally, the ubiquitous influence of digital technologies on academic workspaces and professional identities has profound implications for individual identity formation among academic staff. As this study demonstrates, the constant connectivity afforded by digital devices contributes to a blurring of the traditional boundaries between work and personal life, worsening feelings of *role ambiguity* and *identity conflict* (cf. Wolverton et al., 1999). We may interpret this finding in line with Schatzki's concept of the 'site of the social' (2002), as it highlights the importance of spatial and material arrangements in the constitution of practices. As noted, the physical absence of students in a traditional classroom setting necessitates new forms of interaction and engagement, facilitated by the digital medium. Teachers must navigate this altered spatiality, finding ways to create a sense of presence and community in a virtual environment. For example, teachers may experience pressure to keep an online presence across multiple digital platforms.

Another observation calls upon that hybridization moves specialist professionals to undertake more generalist roles and that this may, in turn, result both in the de-professionalisation of academic work (Pekkola et al., 2024) and greater fragmentation caused by the absence of proper coordination and communication across shared tasks. In other words, multiple people are doing the same tasks in parallel but doing them differently. In the long term, this lack of task integration may cause additional dilemmas and tensions for staff and students alike, resulting in de-rationalisation and academic alienation (Heffron, 2022) and greater hybridisation of tasks and procedures, which, in turn, are likely to increase complexity and ambiguity (virtuous cycle).

A preliminary conclusion thus suggests that digitalization forms a pivotal force in changing and hybridizing teaching practices among academic staff in contemporary HE contexts. By transforming pedagogical practices, digital technologies fundamentally reshape the landscape of academic work in terms of

teaching, and professional identities. As HEIs grapple with the challenges posed by this hybridity, it becomes necessary to critically examine the intersections between digitalization and teaching practices, fostering a nuanced understanding of the evolving nature of teaching and learning practices in the digital age.

Finally, the study's findings should be interpreted with the acknowledgment of the limitations of data resulting from the small number of interviews conducted, the selected disciplinary fields represented, as well as the lack of a longitudinal design that would capture ongoing developments over time. Additionally, the study lacked a comparative perspective across different Nordic countries, as the focus was solely on Norway.

Future studies could, for example, investigate how these emerging new practices influence teaching-learning dynamics, both positively and negatively, across HE systems in different countries. What is more, since the fall of 2022, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has intensified the discussion on how digital technologies impact teaching and learning in HEIs (Lim et al., 2023). This calls for future inquiries that highlight new areas of teachers' practices and how the coexistence of old and new/emerging digital technologies may result in newer areas of hybridization of T&L and other academic-related work practices, in which AI may or may not act as a cocreator of knowledge.

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Hybrid Roles in the Making

Analysing the Effects of Digitalisation on Academic Roles and Relations in Nordic Higher Education

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Abstract

The escalating use of digital technologies in higher education – prior to, during and following the COVID-19 global health pandemic – has contributed to the emergence of a hybrid environment, which seem to be affecting academic roles. This chapter investigates how Nordic universities' digitalisation processes affect traditional teaching roles and academic relationships by incorporating or blending with other non-academic roles. The findings confirm the proposition that academic roles are indeed evolving in complex ways, in the context of tripartite relations amongst university (teachers, students and support staff) and external actors. These findings have relevancy to both practitioners and researchers interested in the changing nature of the academic profession as well as universities as hybrids organizations operating in dynamic hybridized environments.

Keywords

digitalisation – academic roles – teaching and learning – Nordic higher education – hybridity – boundary spanner – third space professionals

1 Introduction

Changes in the environments in which universities and other types of higher education institutions (HEIs) operate have, in the last three decades, resulted in adjustments in professional academic roles. Globalization and internationalization meant that more and more academics have embraced English as a professional language, for either teaching or research (Sørensen et al., 2019). The rise of the 'third mission' implied that more and more academic professionals became involved with engagement activities with a wide variety of external

parties across the public, private and civic sectors (Pinheiro et al., 2015). Managerialism and the professionalization of administrative (support) tasks have led to increasing bureaucratization and rationalization of HEIs' internal structures and procedures (Maassen & Stensaker, 2019). Likewise, competition and the impetus for enhanced social impact is affecting recruitment and career promotion practices (Pietila & Pinheiro, 2021). Gender-related dimensions remain a key feature across many HE systems, despite some progress in recent years (Avramović et al., 2021; Klenk et al., 2022). Significant gaps exist with respect to the working conditions of junior (temporary) versus established (permanent) academics, with short-term contracts (precarity) gradually becoming the norm in many countries (Teichler et al., 2013, p. 113). The concomitant rise of quality, accountability, and performance management regimes (Hazelkorn et al., 2018) has contributed to the emergence of multiple tensions, dilemmas, paradoxes, and frustrations amongst academic professionals (Poutanen, 2023; Pinheiro & Pulkkinen, 2023), with some deciding to exit the profession whatsoever (Kalio et al., 2024). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to ongoing patterns of academic alienation and the growing gap between 'haves' and 'have nots' (Nokkala et al., 2023).

When it comes to the core activities of teaching and research, studies from across the globe, on the changing nature of the academic profession, suggest the following trends:

- In 2007, university professors located in advanced (middle to high income) countries reported working about 48 hours per week, compared to 40 hours for emerging economies;
- Full professors spent, on average, 32% of their working time on teaching, compared to 38% on research;
- Junior academics based at universities spend, on average, a higher proportion of their working time on research and a lower proportion on teaching, when compared to professors;
- The overwhelming majority (84%) of professors report, on average, that research activities help reinforce their teaching, aligned with the Humboldtian idea of the teaching-research nexus;
- A substantial, and growing, proportion of working time dedicated to non-core tasks, like service and administration, is being reported; up to 17 hours per week in some cases (Teichler et al., 2013; Kehm & Teichler, 2013).

Recent studies from the Nordic region show that the academic profession's roles and task expectations have increased considerably in the last two decades (Avramović, 2024). Academics are, amongst other things, expected to improve the global standing (research rankings) of their universities and

research groups, help raise external funding (competitive research tenders), be actively involved with commercialization and other types of ‘third stream’ activities, in addition to contributing to teaching quality and curriculum innovations (Geschwind et al., 2022).

When it comes to digitalization, studies suggest that the phenomenon is having an impact in terms of traditional teaching tasks and roles (e.g., around blended learning), among other aspects, putting pressures on staff to become more digitally literate (Lazareva & Tømte, 2024). The wide adoption of learning management systems (LMS) within teaching has changed the nature in which teachers and students interact, digitally, beyond the classroom (Dobre, 2015). Educational developers, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) experts and other types of professional support staff are increasingly gaining prominence and influence within university settings (Ryttberg & Geschwind, 2017; Scholkmann, 2023), resulting in new tensions and dilemmas insofar academic roles. As is the case of universities as organizations (Pekkola et al., 2022), the nature of the modern academic profession is increasingly hybrid(ised) in nature (Siekkinen et al., 2020; Pekkola et al., 2021; Avramovic, 2024).

This chapter seeks to provide new empirical and conceptual insights by posing the question: *How are academic roles and relations adjusting to hybridity derived from ongoing digitalisation processes within Nordic universities?* Empirically, the study builds on qualitative datasets from two case universities located in a Nordic country. In the next section we provide an elucidation of the conceptual approach for the study, followed by an exposition of its methodological underpinnings. After a presentation of key findings, the chapter discusses them in the light of the conceptual model adopted and the extant literature, followed by a short reflection insofar its research implications.

2 Digitalization, Hybridity and Changing Academic Roles

The theoretical and analytical approach draws on several strands of literature, including studies of hybridity in the nonprofit sector. In the latter, hybridity generally denotes the intricate organizational structures emerging when organizations and communities grapple with diverse task assignments, legitimacy challenges, and/or resource scarcities (McMullin & Skelcher, 2018). Hybridity has also been defined as the blending of what were considered to be incompatible approaches into ‘hybrids’ (Smith, 2010). In this sense, hybrid organizations are seen as organizations that combine two or more of the three traditional logics (Jay, 2013; Pache & Santos, 2013) and thus blur the boundaries between the “private,” “public,” and “non-profit” sectors (Billis, 2010; Ebrahim

et al., 2014). The literature identifies the integration of different institutional logics, the blurring of sector boundaries and the adoption of diverse funding or resource mechanisms as key aspects of hybrid organizations (Doherty et al., 2014; Jay, 2013). Drawing from these studies, hybridity in the context of this study refers to the blurring of traditional academic roles and relations with that of new/emerging roles and relations derived from ongoing efforts (both top-down and bottom up) towards digitalisation within teaching. That said, it is important to reiterate that research tasks, a key component of academics' professional roles, are also affected by ongoing digitalisation processes, however in this study we narrow our analysis to the effects on teaching roles only.

In addition, the chapter draws upon key concepts from the literature on the changing HE and academic landscapes, such as 'third-space professionals' (Klein et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2011), 'boundary spanners' (Burns & Baker, 2016; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010), 'boundary crossers' (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) and 'hybrid educators' (Jennings & Peloso, 2010; Williams, 2014). The latter concepts generally examine how individuals or entities operate at the interface between different groups, organizations, and/or domains. The chief argument, to be tested empirically in this chapter, is that traditional teaching roles and professional relations of academic staff are changing, both in scope and nature, following the growth of digital technology in HE. One starting assumption is that the growing hybridity is likely to negatively affect the traditional autonomy associated with the *teaching role* in terms of the freedom to choose instructional methods, pedagogical orientations, learning assessments, etc.

Traditionally, the educational aspect of academic endeavours within universities revolved around delivering lectures to classes, ranging from small to very large. The academic role of teaching, in this regard, involves instructors delivering content to students in a one-way communication format, typically through spoken presentations in a classroom setting (Hovenga & Bricknell, 2006). In this capacity, academic staff were responsible for developing lectures, creating assessments, and grading assignments for all students in the class. Additional student-lecturer interaction often took place in supplementary tutorial sessions, typically led by junior academics or graduate assistants. In such traditional academic settings, interactions between academic staff, university administration, students and third-space professionals were limited.

However, academic roles and relations of academic staff have been challenged, re-shaped and evolved in the last three decades or so (Lingard & McCollow, 1996; McInnis, 1999). Scholars have identified the integration of digital technology into teaching and learning (as well as research) as an important factor in the transformation of academic roles and relations (Collis & Messing, 2001; Yetton, 1997). The integration of digital tools necessitates a fundamental

paradigm shift as it demands a different skill set from both academic staff and students compared to traditional lecture-based and assessment methods. In such contexts, academics are required to combine traditional academic work with new administrative tasks like drafting assessment reports, preparing funding applications, acquiring digital literacy skills, alongside fulfilling one's "normal" administrative duties at the departmental and faculty levels (Avramovic, 2024; Kim, 2019).

Across the Nordic countries, over the past two decades government-mandated reforms have targeted digitalization to ensure effective and efficient public service delivery (Tømte et al., 2020). The digital efforts by government and HEIs alike have been accelerated following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the Spring of 2020 (Laterza et al., 2023; Tømte et al., 2020). Academic institutions worldwide have been compelled to embrace digital education and the expansion of digital systems (Pinheiro et al., 2023b). As a non-linear and complex process, digitalization encompasses the upgrading (of old) and the introduction of new work-related rules, procedures, and methods, in tandem with the training of both academic and non-academic staff on digital platforms and learning management systems (Laterza et al., 2020; Pinheiro et al., 2023a).

The adoption of online teaching, flipped classrooms, uploading of materials, digital assessment of students, provision of feedback, digital communications, meetings and interactions between academic and non-academic staff have become the new normality within the university environment (Tømte et al., 2019). Providing online and onsite support to address connectivity issues and other emergencies and disseminating new digital technologies to faculties and departments has become an important support task for ICT and learning platform experts, which have played a key role in the management of digital teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Laterza et al., 2023; Pinheiro et al., 2023b).

These developments have shaped relationships within universities and with external stakeholders, and have encouraged alternative ways of working and learning, giving rise to new roles and power relations that have merged with what is considered traditional teaching roles within HEIs (Hermansen & Lund, 2023; Tømte & Lazareva, 2023). Such transformation, conceived here largely as a direct consequence of digitalization, leads to changes in academic identities and fosters the blurring of the traditional roles of teachers and students with non-academic roles, resulting in the emergence of complex hybrid roles (Alton et al., 2024; Phompun et al., 2013; Zeichner, 2010a, b). These boundary spanning roles may take a wide variety of forms depending on the context and task at hand, ranging from 'fixer', 'bridger', 'broker', 'innovator', 'interpreter', 'communicator', 'reticultist', 'entrepreneur' and/or 'coordinator' (Williams, 2013; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018). In short, the inherent complexity associated with growing hybridity within university environments, both endogenous

and exogenous, reflects itself on the manifestation of role hybridity as a coping mechanism to deal with and manage the emerging tensions, paradoxes and contradictions (Pinheiro & Pulkkinen, 2023).

When it comes to *power relations*,¹ new public management (NPM) inspired reforms have introduced *managerialism* – performance management, quality assessment, benchmarking, etc.- within universities (Santiago et al., 2006), including those in the Nordic countries (Hansen et al., 2019; Pinheiro et al., 2019). These changes, in turn, have resulted into a centralisation of decision-making within universities, with many bottom-up collegial structures being replaced by or co-existing with more hierarchical, managerially oriented structures (Torjesen et al., 2017; Kekäle & Pinheiro, 2024). One of the many unintended consequences of such developments was the decline in the levels of trust between academics and university managers (Hansen et al., 2019), resulting in power struggles and growing alienation amongst academics (Poutanen 2023; Nokkala et al., 2023).

While certain academic roles seem to have remained relatively unchanged, others underwent a substantial shift towards greater fluidity, including pedagogical principles for digitally mediated teaching and the establishment of new routines supporting collective teaching approaches (Hermansen & Lund, 2023). Academic staff multiple roles within HEIs, because of digitalization, operate at the interface or boundary between different sub-units and external stakeholders. Daily interactions between academic staff, the university, students, and third-space professionals help shape and redefine academic roles (Martin et al., 2011; Klein et al., 2013).

The study posits that digitalization, both prior to and after COVID-19, has led to the emergence of new, non-academic roles for university academic staff, herein referred to as hybrid roles. The latter emerge through a web of tripolar interactions, including staff interactions with the university (administration, faculty and department level), with students, often mediated by technology, and with third-space professionals, both internal and external to the university. Thus, the complexity derived from digitalisation, we argue, is leading to growing hybridity insofar academic roles within teaching. How this process manifests itself empirically is illustrated and discussed in the following sections, using Norway as a case study.

3 Data and Methodology

The datasets used encompass a total of 6 semi-structured interviews (both online and face-face) conducted during the winter of 2023. Data were gathered from two Norwegian universities characterized by contrasting sizes and

institutional profiles. One such institution represents a longstanding, traditional university, while the other attained university status more recently, thereby offering distinct contextual backgrounds for analysis. Using a purposive sample strategy, academic staff with the administrative task of coordinating Bachelor's (BA) and Master's (MA) degree programs across diverse disciplinary domains, including education, information systems, law, languages, health, and biology, were selected. The age, experience, backgrounds and gender of the respondents varied, providing an account of the diversity associated with academic staff employed at (Nordic) universities.

Furthermore, the study builds on ethnographic data and insights collected through direct participations and observations at different teaching development activities at Norwegian HEIs as well as the co-authors' roles as academic teachers and active users of various digital learning platforms.

4 Data Findings

The data analyses confirm the rise of a hybrid role for academic staff emerging through the growing integration of digital technology in HE. Digitization has emerged in the form of online teaching, flipped classrooms, uploading of materials, digital assessment of students, provision of feedback, digital communications, and digital meetings. These developments have blurred academic-staff interactions within and outside the university environment, giving rise to a hybrid role in which academic staff combine academic and non-academic responsibilities and interactions together with academic and non-academic stakeholders. These three types of interactions and how they impact the roles of academic staff in a hybrid form are presented and discussed below.

4.1 *Academic Staff and Internal Interactions: Administration, Faculty, and Department*

The integration of digital technologies in academic work, insofar teaching and learning activities, entails substantial institutional support for the professional development of academic staff in the context of digital skills and literacy. This encompasses providing training sessions focused on designing electronic learning, communications, and teaching-related materials. This also includes the establishment of separate design teams within the different faculties and departments to produce multimedia materials with content customized to the specific courses offered by each faculty and department. Such an approach mandates sufficient resource allocation to faculties for the recruitment and acquisition of resources tailored to their distinct requirements. As one faculty member noted:

We have prioritized the use of different resources; the focus on study quality is about making a holistic learning design where the digital resources reinforce and build on what already exists.

These developments inevitably led to increased academic and administrative workload for academic staff. Increased digital training programs, communications at the levels of the central administration, faculty and department alongside online administrative tasks mean that academic and non-academic staff have been drawn closer than ever, blurring the boundaries between the two. One professor reflected on this tension:

With digitalization projects, you experience 100% teaching and no research because it's so time-consuming.

On the other hand, this process has also resulted in a new set of tensions and dilemmas, notably:

- Varying demands leading to the emergence of new academic and non-academic roles especially in communicating and soliciting support from the university, faculty and department levels.
- Academic staff responding to the co-existence of several leadership structures at the university, faculty and department levels with academic and administrative leaders working together (both creating tensions and new transaction costs).
- The combination of administrative and academic roles, and the need to balance growing academic workloads and expansive administrative responsibilities for academic staff.

In short, the integration of digital technologies in HE has increased the academic and administrative workload for academic staff, blurring the boundaries between academic and non-academic roles. This has led to “managerial hybridity,” where academic staff must balance growing academic tasks with expanding administrative responsibilities. This finding highlights how digitalization has contributed to role hybridity by requiring academic staff to navigate both academic and administrative duties, blending their traditional roles with new responsibilities related to their teaching.

4.2 *Academic Staff and Third Space Professionals' Interactions*

One significant effect of the integration and growth of digitalization from the data lies on the emergence of third space professionals like educational and platform developers as well as ICT staff, who provide required technological

tools and support. These professionals are found both within the university environment as well as outside it. Both case universities have established a dedicated multimedia unit tasked with training, developing, and incorporating learning materials based on designs provided by academics. Such units serve all faculties and departments across the university, drawing upon internal as well as external skills and competencies. In some situations, smaller units are also established at the departmental level (in the case of University B/traditional) to coordinate activities between the department level and the university central administration. Finally, universities also engage with external stakeholders, who mainly provide digital materials and applications, alongside digital support once necessary. These developments were found to have impacted traditional academic roles and relations amongst the academic staff, along the following aspects:

- Although academics typically possess a significant degree of autonomy and decision-making authority, they are subjected to decisions imposed by providers of digital tools and materials in certain essential areas. Such decisions, in turn, significantly impact their autonomy as teachers, to choose instructional methods independently from external expectations and demands.
- The emergence of new support roles and relations, with academic staff communicating and responding to new/emerging demands and requirements from internal digital experts on the one hand and external platform providers on the other.
- Increased competition for skills and resources, and the need for strategic prioritisation.
- Digitalization has expanded access to a vast array of educational materials, research databases, and online tools, enabling academic staff to enhance their teaching and research activities.

The rise of third space professionals, such as educational developers and ICT staff, has introduced new support roles and altered traditional academic relationships. Academics now interact with both internal digital experts and external platform providers, leading to new demands, increased competition for resources, and a shift in decision-making authority. One faculty member described the collaborative yet challenging nature of this relationship:

There has been a collaboration between administrative and scientific forces. We've worked closely with the learning lab, which is good at contributing with everything from digital tools to pedagogy.

While such collaborations can enhance pedagogical innovation, they also create tensions regarding decision-making authority and academic autonomy. As

digital experts influence curriculum delivery and technological choices, faculty members report feeling constrained:

Although academics typically possess a significant degree of autonomy, they are now subjected to decisions imposed by providers of digital tools and materials in essential areas.

This finding highlights the hybrid nature of academic roles as they extend beyond traditional boundaries to include collaborations with third space professionals, further integrating non-academic responsibilities into their work, and limiting their autonomy as teachers.

4.3 *Academic Staff Roles and Student Interactions*

The variety of teaching and learning options provided by the new digital technologies allows education to be provided in an appropriate manner to a broader student population than ever before. Universities must provide teaching academics with effective guidance in managing their workload, appropriate support, and sufficient materials to students. Digital technology provides distance education programs, particularly overseas, and in a combined approach by universities situated over multiple campuses (as is the case of formal alliances and other types of inter-university partnerships). Digital tools have also catapulted technology as a central infrastructure to support teaching and learning both onsite and across remote locations beyond the main university campus. In doing so, it has allowed universities to reach non-traditional students audiences, like adult learners, putting pressure on academics to revise old and devise new academic programs (curriculum) and adopt innovative teaching approaches.

As a consequence of these transformations, hybrid academic work is manifested in the form of online teaching, flipped classrooms, uploading of materials, digital assessment of students, provision of feedback, digital communications, meetings and interactions between academics and students. These have become the new normality (routine task) within the university environment. As for the academic roles related to interactions with students, these have become hybridized along several fronts, namely:

- *Expanding access to learning materials through digital platforms.* Digitalization has expanded access to learning materials and support through online platforms, making education more accessible regardless of geographical location or time constraints. However, reliance on digital communication tools has also introduced new challenges. As one faculty member noted:

Students use Canvas as a communication platform. Since I get emails from everywhere, I don't go into Canvas to get my emails forwarded. And then

it's impossible to know if I'm the only one who has received this email or if it has reached everyone involved in teaching a subject.

This reflects the difficulties academics face in managing multiple communication channels and ensuring clear, effective student engagement.

- *Blurring of online and face-to-face interactions between academic staff and students.* While digitalization has created flexible learning environments, it has also disrupted traditional modes of engagement. One professor described the challenge of balancing different communication tools:

For example, we now have three subjects that are quite closely linked. They are a joint project. And together, five, no, six students have received this email. We have two on each subject, plus a swarm of teaching assistants. When I receive a message, I don't know if it's ... If it had been email, I would have seen that it was cc'd and the main recipient was someone else.

This highlights how digital platforms can sometimes fragment communication rather than streamline it.

- *Enhanced communications and provision of feedback (assessment) mechanisms.* Faculty members report increased reliance on digital evaluation tools, yet these systems often introduce technical barriers. One faculty member recounted difficulties with automated student surveys:

We also experience apification, for example, with midway evaluation, which we have in Canvas. Many have had problems setting up a survey to trigger at a certain point in time. We experienced, last year, that a lot of data was lost due to a data problem with the supplier.

These challenges underscore the need for user-friendly and reliable digital assessment platforms.

- *Personalization of learning experiences through digital assessments and analytics.* Digitalization has enabled more tailored feedback mechanisms, allowing faculty to track student progress through data analytics, and adjust teaching strategies accordingly. However, response rates to digital feedback mechanisms remain a concern. One professor explained:

If you gather students in a room with the elected representatives, then it's those who like to speak who raise their hands and say something. In a

digital setting, those who like filling out forms will do so, and those who are dissatisfied will fill them out to vent.

This raises questions about the representativeness of digital feedback and how student engagement can be more inclusively captured, along the following lines:

- Expanded access to a vast array of educational materials, research databases, and online tools. This has enabled academic staff to enhance their teaching (and research) activities. Faculty members have leveraged digital tools to integrate multimedia elements such as videos, simulations, and interactive exercises, enriching the learning experience. However, mastering these tools requires significant time and effort. As one academic noted, *“every time you learn something new, you have to learn something new again.”* This illustrates the continuous learning curve faculty members face as they adapt to new technologies.
- Leveraging of digital tools to incorporate multimedia elements, such as videos, simulations, and interactive exercises, into academics’ teaching materials. This is reported to have enriched the learning experience, captures students’ attention, and enhances engagement during interactions. Teachers’ new role encompasses acquiring a new set of digital skills and competencies essential to administer such responsibilities.
- Finally, artificial intelligence (AI) is the latest manifestation of this digital transition, posing both new challenges but also opportunities in terms of teaching and learning, an aspect being taken rather seriously, strategically speaking, within the case universities.

In effect, digital technologies have transformed academic staff interactions with students by enabling flexible, personalized, and multimedia-enhanced learning experiences. However, these changes have also introduced new complexities, requiring academics to develop digital competencies while navigating fragmented communication systems and evolving feedback mechanisms. The ongoing digital transition continues to shape the hybrid nature of academic roles, blurring distinctions between online and face-to-face engagement in HE.

5 Conclusive Discussion

Digitalisation has disrupted the activities of HEIs worldwide, a process that preceded the ‘forced’ adoption of digital tools and teaching and learning platforms during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter set out to investigate

the effects of digitalisation in academic roles within Nordic universities. The findings suggest increasing hybridisation, manifested in the form of the blurring of boundaries between academic and non-academic tasks, and the emergence of a complex web of relations between academics and other key stakeholders both internal and external ones.

The data suggest that growing hybridisation resulting from digitalisation is leading to a reduction on the levels of autonomy amongst academics when it comes to teaching, and creating new tensions resulting from multiple external influences in teaching-related activities. These include but are not limited to the need to coordinate and communicate across the board, including with external experts, as well as the often-unintended consequences resulting from the uncritical adoption of digital tools and platforms without considering their impact on teaching and learning dimensions (pedagogical approaches, students and teachers' engagements, quality and learning assessment methods, etc). Moreover, changes in academic roles are also affecting academic practices (see Tømte et al. in this volume), as the two are intrinsically connected with one another (cf. Alvarez et al., 2009).

In terms of changing academic roles more broadly, these can be tied to the ways in which, as boundary spanners, the key actors referred to above (teachers, administrators/support staff and students) are influencing one another insofar the tasks and challenges at hand. In doing so, they perform a wide variety of boundary spanning roles, both within and across university boundaries, ranging from *fixer*, *bridger*, *broker* and/or *innovator* (van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018), depending on the specific task and the contextual circumstances, e.g., during the recent Covid-19 crisis (Pinheiro et al., 2023a, 2023b).

The data also show evidence of emerging academic roles more directed towards communication and collaboration in the form of 'interpreter', 'communicator', 'reticultist', 'entrepreneur' and/or 'coordinator' (Williams, 2013). Lastly, as a result of digitalisation processes within teaching, academic staff across the two cases universities were found to perform a wide variety of new/emerging roles that included 'exchanging', 'linking', 'facilitating' and 'intervening' (Barner-Rasmussen, 2017). In short, the associated terms of 'boundary spanners' (Burns & Baker, 2016; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010), 'boundary crossers' (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) and 'hybrid educators' (Jennings & Peloso, 2010; Williams, 2014) seem to apply rather nicely to the Nordic situation in the context of creeping digitalisation.

From a broader perspective, the data findings reported in this chapter should be assessed in the light of ongoing structural transformations at HEIs in the Nordics and elsewhere. These include; reductions in public funding, a stronger policy emphasis on teaching when compared to research, the rise of quality and assessment cultures, an impetus given to graduate employability, co-creation of knowledge together with external stakeholders, as well as the

need to redesign curriculum structures and adjust university missions for a changing labor market and global economy that are increasingly shaped by the salience of digital technologies, including AI.

Needless to say this study (limited in scope and scale) has obvious limitations and thus more research is needed to unpack the complex web of relations that has been identified, as well as to determine the extent to which digitalisation performs a transformative role when it comes to teaching and learning in HE both in the Nordics and beyond.

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Note

- 1 For seminal discussions on types of academic authority and the challenges associated with academic control, see Clark (1983, pp. 110–124) and Birnbaum (1988, pp. 9–15), respectively.

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PART 3

Nordic Universities and Marketisation



Hybridity within Market-Based Accountability in Higher Education Teaching

Tomi Rajala

Abstract

Based on documents and 17 interviews, this qualitative study explores how university teachers experience hybridity within market-based accountability and what shapes these experiences. It also investigates how and why teachers manage hybridity. The results show that hybridity arises from teaching in both market-funded executive and government-funded programs. The study identifies both shared and individual experiences influenced by teaching roles, administrative duties, and personal perceptions. To address the complexity of hybridity, teachers employ simplification mechanisms guided by selectiveness and amplification mechanisms driven by deliberate emphasis. The results deepen conceptual understanding of hybridity in higher education accountability. Practical insights are also provided for researchers and practitioners navigating hybridity.

Keywords

hybridity within market-based accountability – quasi-market accountability – higher education – university teaching

1 Introduction

In an era marked by rankings, accreditations, and resource constraints, universities compete for students (Farhan, 2016) and funding (Elango & Dhandapani, 2020). To stay competitive, many universities now offer executive education, which introduces market-based accountabilities into higher education (Beach, 2013).

University teachers in these environments face what Rajala et al. (2024) term *hybridity within market-based accountability* – a blend of market and quasi-market accountabilities. Market accountability arises when universities compete for paying students, while quasi-market accountability involves

competition for high-achieving students whose education is funded by the government.

Market accountability in higher education holds institutions and teachers responsible through the choices of students who pay for their education (Grant & Keohane, 2005). Poor-quality teaching may prompt students to withdraw or choose other institutions (Mashaw, 2006). While students primarily fund their studies, government and private funders may support or withdraw funding based on teaching quality (see Baudot, Dillard & Pencle, 2022). Consequently, universities and teachers must meet the expectations of both students and funders to optimize resources and stay competitive.

Quasi-market accountability in higher education differs from market accountability by involving a public purchaser – typically policymakers or officials – who mediates student preferences, allocates funding, and oversees universities on behalf of citizens (Lowery, 1998). This purchaser establishes service scope, reporting duties, teaching incentives, and penalties through contracts between government and universities (Bennett & Mills, 1998). Unlike traditional markets, quasi-markets are primarily funded by taxes or a combination of taxes and user fees (Kähkönen, 2005; Vakkuri et al., 2021). Citizens influence purchasers and providers via elections, public feedback, complaints, and media scrutiny (Rajala et al., 2024).

Market and quasi-market accountability are components of the broader concept of public accountability. In Anglo-American scholarship, public accountability emphasizes broad evaluative principles like transparency, fairness, and ethics (Bovens, 2007; Bovens et al., 2008). European perspectives define accountability more narrowly as a structured mechanism of post hoc scrutiny (Day & Klein, 1987; Bovens et al., 2008). This study adopts the European view, framing public accountability as a formal relationship in which teachers report to an evaluative forum that assesses their teaching and imposes rewards or sanctions (Bovens, 2007).

In public accountability, university teachers face hybridity within market-based accountability when executive programs follow market accountability and degree programs follow quasi-market accountability. This chapter explores that hybridity by addressing two research questions:

1. How and why do teachers in a higher education institution offering executive and degree programs experience hybridity within market-based accountability?
2. How and why do teachers manage this hybridity?

A case organization offering executive and degree programs was selected to capture diverse perceptions of hybridity arising from market and quasi-market accountabilities. An interview study was chosen for its ability to uncover both

shared and divergent teacher experiences of hybridity through the interviewer's ability to ask follow-up questions.

By addressing the research questions, this chapter fills a gap in the higher education literature regarding the hybridity teachers experience within market-based accountability. Previous studies have primarily examined various forms of accountability, including soft, hard, vertical, and horizontal accountability (Cheng, 2012); internal (Jones, 2007); external (Song & Lai, 2020); political, managerial, professional, and social accountability (Hansen et al., 2019); outcome-based accountability (Högberg & Lindgren, 2020); and public accountability (Coy et al., 2001). Market accountability, however, has received limited attention despite Cheng's (2012) view that accountability development depends on state priorities, market models, and academic concerns. Most research emphasizes state-level and academic professional accountability, including studies on teaching (e.g., Cheng, 2012; Hansen et al., 2019; Högberg & Lindgren, 2020; Song & Lai, 2020). This study contributes by focusing on market-based accountability in higher education. The study shows that academics experience and manage hybridity within market-based accountability in diverse ways, depending on the level of hybridity encountered in their teaching roles and their understanding of it.

2 Higher Education Markets and Hybridity within the Market-Based Accountability

Higher education institutions operate in market or quasi-market contexts, depending on the service type (Komljenovic, 2020). Executive programs function in competitive markets (Reichard, 2017), whereas government-funded education forms quasi-markets where institutions compete for enrollment-based funding. Institutions offering executive and degree programs face market and quasi-market accountability, resulting in hybridity within market-based accountability (e.g., Rajala et al., 2024).

Hybridity within public accountability can take three forms (see Benish & Mattei, 2020; Fimreite & Læg Reid, 2009; Rajala, 2020). First, hybridity can emerge from integrating service-specific accountability variants, such as combining healthcare and education accountabilities (Fimreite & Læg Reid, 2009; Rajala et al., 2020). Second, hybridity can arise by mixing sector-specific variants, where public, private, and voluntary sectors merge their distinct accountabilities (Acar et al., 2008; Willems & van Dooren, 2011; Benish & Mattei, 2020; Rajala & Kokko, 2022). Third, hybridity can result from aligning service-specific accountabilities across sectors, such as healthcare and education accountabilities within public, private, and voluntary domains (Rajala et al., 2021).

Hybridity within market-based accountability emerges from mixing sector-specific mechanisms: market accountability linked to the private sector and quasi-market accountability to the public sector (Rajala et al., 2024). Given the university context, this study focuses on the interplay between market and quasi-market accountabilities within the education sector.

Applying Bovens' (2007) narrow public accountability concept, hybridity within market-based accountability arises when teachers simultaneously engage in the roles, reporting, evaluations, and consequences of both market and quasi-market mechanisms (see Table 10.1). In this hybrid context,

TABLE 10.1 A theoretical framework for hybridity within the market-based accountability

Dimension of accountability	Market accountability ^a	Quasi-market accountability ^a	Hybridity in market-based accountability ^a
Role/responsibility of the teacher	Arranging the production or producing market goods or commercial services ^b	Arranging the production or producing welfare services ^b	Market and quasi-market roles ^b
Account giving/reporting of the teacher	Giving account about profitability, market goods or commercial services ^b	Giving account about resource use or produced welfare services ^b	Market and quasi-market account giving ^b
Account holder (i.e., accountability forum)	Account holders, such as customers and investors ^b	Account holders, such as citizen, politician or public official ^b	Market and quasi-market account holders ^b
Accountability dialogue between teacher and account holder	Accountability dialogue between service providers and investors or customers ^b	Accountability dialogue between service providers and citizen, student, politician or public official ^b	Market and quasi-market accountability dialogues ^b
Consequences arising from judgement	Monetary bonuses, stock options, promotion, dismissal, loss of bonuses, reputational damage ^b	Public praise, career advancement, pay increase, demotion, dismissal, public scrutiny etc. ^b	Consequences related to market and quasi-market accountabilities ^b

a Coding category in the deductive analysis.

b Coding subcategory in the deductive analysis.

Note: This study examines the type of hybridity experienced by university teachers who simultaneously operate within market and quasi-market accountability systems in their teaching roles.

teachers report on commercial services focusing on profitability and government-funded education with attention to resource use. They engage in distinct accountability dialogues with paying students and publicly funded students while facing outcomes such as financial rewards from market mechanisms and public recognition or scrutiny from quasi-market mechanisms (Rajala et al., 2024). The level of hybridity in market-based accountability ranges from none to comprehensive, progressing step by step as additional accountability dimensions from Table 10.1 become hybridized.

3 Research Method

This interpretative research utilizes an intrinsic case study approach (Stake, 1995) to answer the two proposed research questions. Intrinsic case studies are selected when the case is of particular interest, and the researcher seeks to understand it. Here, the case is compelling because teachers experienced and addressed hybridity in various ways, presenting opportunities for scientific knowledge development. The study can be further described as an embedded case study focusing on teachers, unlike a holistic design involving all university staff. As the study examines current practices while aiming to generate new insights, it also qualifies as an exploratory case study (Robson, 2002). It explores how teachers perceive and manage hybridity in market-based accountability across executive and degree programs.

The case organization was suitable for examining the research questions for two reasons. First, the author was granted access to study teaching-related accountability while employed at the institution. Second, the organization offered executive programs for paying students and degree programs that competed in education quasi-markets. The studied university also enrolled tuition-paying students outside the EU, EEA, and Switzerland to its degree programs. Consequently, the case exhibited hybridity in market-based accountability, as experienced by the teaching staff.

Yin's (1998) recommendation to use a case study protocol was followed to ensure reliability. The protocol included research questions, method, permission procedures, ethical considerations, interpretation process, and criteria for assessing study quality. The study spanned two years, though the exact timeframe is withheld to preserve the organization's anonymity.

To enhance construct validity and support data triangulation, the author followed Yin's (1998) recommendation to gather data from multiple sources. Seventeen interviews were conducted to address the two research questions. Additionally, 60 documents were reviewed to verify the presence of market

and quasi-market features as acknowledged and reported by the case organization (see the next section). These documents also played a key role in case selection.

The limited number of interviews in this study is justified by its focused design. The narrow emphasis on hybridity within market-based accountability among university teachers required fewer participants than in broader studies on accountability hybridity. Academics from a higher education institution operating under market and quasi-market accountability systems formed the highly special sample. This narrow scope, combined with semi-structured data collection and analysis based on Table 10.1 (drawing on Bovens' accountability model and Rajala et al.'s [2024] hybrid model), minimized the need for a larger sample. Additionally, high-quality interviews with knowledgeable participants provided rich, detailed data that enhanced the depth of the results. The cross-sectional case study design further reduced the number of required interviewees by eliminating the need for repeated interviews or data collection across multiple organizations.

All 17 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. For reliability purposes, interviews were saved to a case study database with the documents.

Two participants were interviewed in writing to reduce the risk of interviewer bias. As their responses aligned with the overall findings, no evidence of interviewer bias was detected.

Selection bias was limited, as 65% of teachers contacted participated, representing a broad range of teaching profiles. The sample included both experienced and inexperienced teachers, those teaching exclusively in quasi-market settings, and others active in both market and quasi-market contexts. Participants also differed in their level of administrative responsibilities.

To mitigate respondent bias, the researcher used several techniques. These included ensuring anonymity, neutral question framing, multiple data collection methods, and clear participant instructions. Interviewees were anonymized differently in tables and text to prevent readers from linking in-text quotations to specific teachers based on the teaching roles listed in the tables.

An interpretive analysis was selected to explore preliminary theoretical ideas on how teachers perceive and manage hybridity within market-based accountability, particularly across executive and degree programs (see Merriam, 1988). The first phase of interview analysis employed theory-driven deductive coding to interpret individual experiences of teaching-related accountability. Based on Table 10.1, three main coding categories were applied: market accountability, quasi-market accountability, and hybridity within market-based accountability (i.e., a combination of both types). Subcategories

were also derived from Table 10.1, with each cell in the market, quasi-market, and hybrid columns representing a distinct subcategory. Since teachers may experience market accountability, quasi-market accountability, or hybridity within market-based accountability, Table 10.1 presents differing theoretical perspectives on teachers' experiences in higher education. It thus offers external validity and theoretical triangulation through rival explanations of how teachers experience accountability in teaching.

The second part of the interview analysis adopted an interpretative lens with an inductive approach to examine how teachers navigate hybridity within market-based accountability. Two meta-mechanisms emerged as the primary analytical categories: *selectiveness* and *deliberate emphasis*. Eight simplification mechanisms associated with selectiveness and three amplification mechanisms linked to deliberate emphasis were identified as subcategories. These mechanisms are compared to existing theoretical concepts on managing hybridity in public administration to enhance external validity.

The analysis presents a thick description and a transparent chain of evidence leading to the conclusions. This transparency lets readers assess whether interpretations are data-grounded or arbitrary.

4 Study Context

The case organization operated in a Nordic country where higher education institutions compete for students while receiving government funding for degree programs. In this quasi-market system, the public sector acts as purchaser and regulator. Degree programs are primarily tax-funded, promoting accessibility and equality. The sector includes public and private institutions: students at public universities generally do not pay tuition, except those from outside the EU, EEA, and Switzerland. In private institutions, students may pay some tuition fees for degree programs.

The government uses an incremental approach to implementing performance development agreements in the context of the study. Such agreements are developed through dialogue between the ministry and each institution based on the institution's strategies. Additionally, the government issues a directive-like document to each university, outlining grants, funding conditions, performance targets, reporting requirements, and ministry expectations. Although this document is discussed with universities and resembles a performance contract, it is not a formally negotiated agreement. Nevertheless, some government funding is performance-based, tied to student progression and graduation rates.

The case organization offered executive education in a competitive market where institutions tailor programs to professional demand. Pricing reflects perceived value and institutional reputation, consistent with market-based mechanisms. To attract executives, providers differentiate through course quality, faculty expertise, credential prestige, and by aligning offerings with career goals, learning preferences, and budgets. The market is segmented by industry, managerial level, and specialization. To stay competitive, providers innovate through updated curricula. This dynamic environment – marked by differentiation, choice, and strategic pricing – reflects the structure of a traditional market.

5 Illustrative Accounts of Market and Quasi-Market Accountability

Teacher C holds multiple teaching and administrative roles across the executive MBA, bachelor's, and master's programs. Administrative roles may involve hierarchical positions or participation in boards or committees overseeing teaching. Teacher C provides formal and informal reports to university administration in all programs – such as course evaluations, grade distributions, and student feedback. These reports are used to evaluate the quality and relevance of the courses. As Teacher C noted, “We do evaluations every single day.”

Teacher C engages in ongoing discussions about teaching outcomes in both the executive and degree programs with various stakeholders, such as students, administrative directors, or colleagues. Teacher C explains this in the following manner: “I discuss with others how we can improve the program.”

Executive students provide daily evaluations, and poor performance can result in contract termination. Teacher C illustrated this by saying, “If I don't deliver, then I will not have a new contract next year.” Conversely, positive feedback can lead to ongoing teaching opportunities and praise in executive programs.

In the bachelor's and master's programs, poor evaluations can lead to discussions and adjustments in teaching duties, while positive feedback enhances teacher's opportunities and reputations. As Teacher C said, the department head “is very keen on flagging good teaching.”

Teacher B teaches at the master's and executive levels, reporting teaching activities through end-of-course evaluations and student feedback. Teacher B views the institution and students as primary account holders, stating, “I think I'm accountable to the school ... and also ... to the students because they expect to learn.” Self-accountability is also important, as shown in the following reflection: “I try to self-reflect ... see if I can fix something or adjust for the next course.”

In the executive and master’s programs, Teacher B’s accountability dialogue mainly involves students and peers. In the executive program, informal recognition serves as the primary reward. While formal consequences are also limited in the master’s program, appreciation from colleagues and students shapes Teacher B’s sense of accountability. Teacher B states: “In terms of appreciation, I think yes. I mean, even if I’m not on the top of the ranking list [based on course evaluation scores] ... it’s fine.” If a course performs poorly, pedagogic training may be required, according to Teacher B.

6 Theory-Driven Analysis of Hybridity in the Teachers’ Accountability

Teachers at the executive and degree programs understood that executive students pay for their education, while degree programs are government-funded. As interviewee G noted, “These executive students are paying a lot ... [while] the government pay, and we use tax money on this [degree program].” Teachers in both market and quasi-market contexts also acknowledged ongoing competition for students and their freedom of choice. As Teacher B stated, “There is for sure some competition for the students, and this is for the master as well as for the executive [programs], I think.”

Although the interviewees did not use the term ‘hybridity,’ they were experiencing it as actors in quasi-market and market accountability processes (see Tables 10.2 and 10.3). Teachers involved in both executive and degree-level

TABLE 10.2 Similarities in experienced hybridity within market-based accountability

Informant	Common description of role/responsibility	Common description of reporting	Common description of account holders
1 ^a	Executive and degree teaching	Student feedback is an important part of reporting in market and quasi-market accountability.	Paying students are account holders in market accountability, while non-paying students hold that role in quasi-market accountability.
2 ^a			
5 ^a			
6 ^a			
7 ^a			
10 ^a			
17 ^a			

a Experienced hybridity within market-based accountability.

TABLE 10.3 More similarities in experienced hybridity within market-based accountability

Informant	Common description of accountability dialogue	Common description of consequences
1 ^a	Accountability dialogues are more collective in executive programs than in master programs.	Monetary incentives
2 ^a		are better in the market
5 ^a		accountability of executive
6 ^a		programs than quasi-market
7 ^a		degree programs.
10 ^a		

a Experienced hybridity within market-based accountability.

programs viewed executive education as a distinct context from bachelor's and master's programs. Although they did not use the terms "quasi-market" or "market" accountability, they emphasized differing accountability expectations. Interviewee N observed, "They pay, so I definitely think the accountability is greater in the executive program," while Interviewee J described executive education as "a spot market basically," where "semester by semester ... they only ask you to come back if they think you did a good job previous semester".

Executive teaching introduced some performance pressures, but most interviewees viewed the different accountabilities as more synergistic than conflicting. Despite minor tensions, teachers generally found market-based accountabilities functional, well-aligned, and manageable. Many valued their roles in executive and degree programs, and they considered participation in executive programs a privileged opportunity.

The degree of experienced hybridity in market-based accountability varied with teachers' roles across executive, undergraduate, and graduate programs. Those involved in the teaching and administration of executive and degree programs typically faced greater hybridity (see Table 10.4), reporting to multiple audiences and serving as course providers and assessors. As accountability begins with defining roles and responsibilities, teachers' specific duties shape the hybridity experienced in later phases.

While assigned tasks partly explained differences in experienced hybridity, individual factors like personal views also influenced how teachers perceived and constructed accountability (see Tables 10.5 and 10.6). Even with similar roles in executive and degree programs, experiences varied. For example, Teacher D felt primarily "self-accountable", whereas Teacher C emphasized

TABLE 10.4 Differences in experienced hybridity within market-based accountability

Informant	Hybridity in roles	Hybridity in reporting	Hybridity in account holders
1	3	D	* and §
2	1	B	# and §
5	4	A	†
6	3 and X	C	* and §
7	4	A	† and §
10	2	C	^ and §

Notes:

1 = Administrative role only in executive teaching.

2 = Administrative role only in master or undergraduate level.

3 = Administrative roles in executive and master or undergraduate level.

4 = No administrative role in executive and master or undergraduate level.

X = Has heavy teaching load in undergraduate and master level.

A = Reports only on teaching in executive and degree program courses.

B = Reports on teaching at the executive and master's or undergraduate level, and additionally on the administration of teaching at the executive level.

C = Reports on teaching at the executive, undergraduate and master level and on the administration of teaching at the master's or undergraduate level.

D = Reports on teaching and the administration of teaching at the executive and master's or undergraduate level.

* = A teacher and account holder in executive and master or undergraduate level.

= A teacher and account holder in executive level.

^ = A teacher and account holder in master or undergraduate level.

† = No account holder roles.

§ = Faces large set of account holders in markets and quasi-markets.

student accountability, stating, "I feel accountable to the students and that's number one [account holder], of course."

Conflicting stakeholder demands can generate tensions within market-based accountabilities. Teacher C described feeling caught between representing students and addressing the growing influence of accreditation bodies: "I feel that I have to represent the students in many cases, as the power of these accreditation units has increased dramatically." Similarly, Teacher D faced challenges in balancing industry feedback with educational quality. Teacher D stated, "I don't always implement what they say because they were short-sighted. But I very much listen to what they say."

TABLE 10.5 Differences in experienced hybridity within market-based accountability dialogues

Informant	Hybridity in accountability dialogues
1	Hybridity leads to frequent evaluation discussions, as teaching in both market and quasi-market contexts requires assessment.
2	There was no dialogue with the school administration about positive performance in quasi-markets, which was the preferred state. Course-related discussions occurred with colleagues and students, while executive programs featured prominent dialogue with accreditation organizations.
5	There are no formal accountability dialogues in either markets or quasi-markets.
6	Dialogues with students are more critical in executive programs, but they do not pressure me.
7	By representing experts in dialogues, one can influence the criteria account holders use to assess teaching performance in quasi-markets.
10	Executive programs involve immediate dialogue and closer interaction between teachers and administrators. In quasi-markets, dialogue usually occurs only when course issues arise, or learning outcomes justify negotiating a higher salary.
17	Dialogues are based on similar feedback in quasi-markets and markets.

Teachers limited to undergraduate or graduate-level teaching encountered only quasi-market accountability mechanisms. For example, Teacher A, who was responsible for master's and PhD courses, did not experience hybridity within market-based accountability. Instead, Teacher A identified a range of quasi-market account holders, including the administration, exam office, students, department peers, and indirectly, politicians and public officials.

Teacher A's use of tools like Canvas and student surveys reflects a structured approach to quality assurance. Regular discussions with the department head, peers, and students on teaching quality, course fit, and evaluations demonstrate ongoing accountability and support continuous improvement aligned with institutional goals. Recognition for good teaching included awards, public praise, and informal acknowledgement. Poor performance was addressed constructively through support programs and pedagogical training without severe consequences such as dismissal (Teacher A).

TABLE 10.6 Differences in experienced hybridity within market-based consequences

Informant	Hybridity in consequences
1	In markets, contract termination is a common consequence. In quasi-markets, outcomes usually involve ending a course or replacing the teacher without terminating their contract.
2	In quasi-markets, consequences may include a pay raise or an invitation to teach in executive programs. In markets, the main outcome is retaining a well-paid teaching position.
5	In both executive and degree programs, poor evaluations serve as the primary sanction.
6	In degree programs, poor course reputations may spread through student rumours, and low national rankings can prompt course redesign. In executive programs, the consequence is being perceived as either matching or not matching the assigned role.
7	In executive programs, consequences for ineffective teaching arise quickly. Degree programs also allow teachers to be changed through temporary contracts and similar arrangements.
10	In executive programs, maintaining your position requires performance above standard. In quasi-markets, consequences include student praise or disapproval, a “failed teacher” label, and personal disappointment.
17	In the executive program, sanctions are low-key. In quasi-markets, the consequences are mild: they primarily help you improve teaching. You can also get a teaching price when teaching goes well.

7 How Do Teachers Manage Hybridity? An Interpretative Analysis

Simplification mechanisms were applied to address hybridity within market-based accountability. Simplification reduces complexity, making hybridity more manageable and understandable for teachers. Several simplification mechanisms identified from the interviews are presented in Table 10.7. This table introduces selectiveness as a meta-mechanism – a higher-order process embedded within specific simplification mechanisms such as segmentation and standardization. Rather than functioning independently, selectiveness operates through these mechanisms, shaping how hybridity is managed in both market and quasi-market accountability contexts.

Categorization reduces hybridity by distinguishing between market and quasi-market accountability, while standardization reinforces these distinctions

TABLE 10.7 Meta-mechanism of simplification mechanisms and hybridity

Simplification mechanism	Form of selectiveness as meta-mechanism applied in simplification mechanisms
Categorization	Selects defining attributes of market and quasi-market accountability.
Standardization	Selects one accountability process as the standard for quasi-markets or markets.
Reductionism	Select what is omitted from the market and quasi-market accountability.
Assimilation	Select a practice from market accountability and apply it in quasi-market accountability – or vice versa – to make differing accountability systems more similar.
Segmentation	Selects where market and quasi-market accountability is used (compartmentalization of complexity).
Temporal simplification	Selects when market and quasi-market accountability are used and in what order.
Delegation	Selects who will address different aspects of hybridity.
Filtration	Select what information is being filtered out from the available information.

by fixing them in the teacher's mind. Together, they help teachers anticipate and navigate accountability expectations in executive and degree programs. Categorization sets clear boundaries for market and quasi-market accountability, avoiding the need to reconcile different expectations for teaching within a single class session. Standardization adds stability by maintaining consistent accountability expectations for executive and degree programs.

One categorization and standardization of executive teaching was that in executive programs, reporting is not so different, but the “director of the program pays much more attention to student feedback ... You are reacting much faster and stronger to, you know, feedback. So people [i.e., teachers] are getting replaced. Teaching is well paid ... In executive education, you have to be more sensitive to what the students like and do not like ... It is more like market ... Students are more like customers” (Teacher N).

To describe accountability in degree programs, teacher D categorized the accountability in the following manner:

I have at least one quite long meeting where I pick out five, six students at the end of the course and get feedback from them ... I feel more responsible

first for myself. And then secondly for the students and perhaps thirdly for the school ... at the end of every course, the students can give a formal feedback ... [and] I have to reflect on how the teaching was, so I have to give a course report back to the administration and say that this is how the course went ... I discuss my [teaching results] if it's low rating ... So if there is a bad score at the course, you must have a meeting with the responsible teacher and the head of the department ... We have something called an excellent teacher ... which you have to apply for and you have to give description of why you're an excellent teacher in an academic way. So then you can get something like 60,000 Kroner extra per year.

The categories teachers used to describe market and quasi-market accountability also reflect a simplification mechanism known as *reductionism*. This reductionism involves focusing on only a few account holders while excluding others such as the industry, Ministry of Education, academic community, and society. Teachers also often omit reporting areas like school reputation or grade distribution and prioritize certain consequences over others. This selective focus simplifies the complexity of hybridity within market-based accountability. One example of reductionism occurred when the interviewer asked, "Do you feel that you're accountable from your teaching to politicians?" to which teacher I stated, "No".

Assimilation reduces hybridity by minimizing differences between market and quasi-market accountabilities through shared procedures. To illustrate similar accountability practices in executive and degree programs, Teacher J noted, "They both have student evaluations of whatever you do."

Hybridity was also managed through segmentation, which compartmentalizes organizational functions for distinct purposes. Temporal simplification often complemented segmentation to clarify when market or quasi-market accountabilities applied. Teachers treated executive programs (market context) and degree programs (quasi-market context) as separate domains, scheduled at different times. This separation helped avoid conflicting expectations between fee-paying and government-funded students and clarified which accountability regime applied in specific lectures, exams, or courses. Segmentation and temporal simplification were essential, as teaching executive and degree students in the same class would be challenging. Interviewee C's answer reflect segmentation:

So our ordinary students. They are, of course, younger, and ... they are emphasizing the grading much more ... that's because they want the job. The other ones [in the executive program], they have A job. So they are of course a bit different in that you have to show them that you have something relevant to tell them. That's the big [difference]. So, you're accountable in a different way.

Many interviewees used delegation to reduce hybridity in their accountability. By delegating the monitoring of educational reforms, teachers limited the market and quasi-market demands they had to consider and avoided directly confronting hybridity. As Interviewee J explained when asked about aligning courses with educational reforms:

There is a system in place for the quality assurance, and they are keen on reading and interpreting everything that comes out from the government ... each lecturer rarely has to think too much about all of this ... there is system in place with quality checks which tries make sure that we conform.

The previous quotation illustrates how administration can amplify hybridity through filtration or mediation. Teachers partly relied on the administration to extract key elements from market and quasi-market contexts. By monitoring stakeholders and selectively passing on relevant instructions, the administration introduced new forms of hybridity into teaching. These filtered guidelines required teachers to engage with emerging accountability demands. Because filtering also excluded certain aspects, it acted as both a simplification and amplification mechanism (see Tables 10.7 and 10.8). Without filtering, the administration could pass on all guidance directly, thereby mediating and amplifying hybridity.

The third observed amplification mechanism for addressing hybridity involved negotiative dialogue to map and balance stakeholder demands. As Teacher C noted, "I meet these students for 50 days ..., I feel that I have to represent the students in many cases, and ... especially for the last five years [because] the power of these accreditation units has increased dramatically."

TABLE 10.8 Meta-mechanisms of amplification mechanisms and hybridity

Amplification mechanism	Form of deliberate emphasis as meta-mechanism applied in amplification mechanisms
Filtration	Foregrounds selected elements of hybridity to make these better visible and actionable.
Mediation	Emphasizes hybridity by passing it on as-is into teaching, allowing teachers to encounter accountability expectations.
Negotiation	Reveals and emphasizes hybridity through dialogue with stakeholders to balance accountability expectations and adjust teaching.

Another teacher described the difficulty of meeting conflicting expectations, such as integrating new topics into an already packed curriculum: “I feel sometimes, especially regarding the content ... this pressure that I need to include something about this, something about that.” (Interviewee B). Through dialogue, teachers sought to reconcile the needs of paying students with standards from policymakers, public officials, and accreditation bodies. This proactive approach allowed them to gather feedback and make adjustments before conflicts escalated.

The meta-mechanism behind amplification is deliberate emphasis, which is used to heighten awareness of hybridity in accountability (see Table 10.8). Teachers apply filtration, mediation, and negotiation to scan the hybridity in their teaching environment. Filtration and mediation highlight key expectations for teachers while saving their time, as teachers need not monitor all stakeholders themselves. If teachers seek firsthand knowledge, they engage in dialogic negotiations with various stakeholders. The extent of such engagement varies by role, as some teaching positions include dialogue and negotiation as part of their formal responsibilities.

8 Conclusions

This interview study focused on understanding hybridity in the market-based accountability of higher education teaching. As a conceptual contribution to higher education literature (e.g., Cheng, 2012; Hansen et al., 2019; Högberg & Lindgren, 2020; Song & Lai, 2020), hybridity was defined as a configuration combining market and quasi-market accountability processes. Such a combination of accountability processes includes various forms of hybridity in roles, reporting, account holders, accountability dialogues, and consequences. This conceptualization can help practitioners better understand how hybridity shapes experiences across different teaching contexts.

By confirming the existence of hybridity within market-based accountability, the study provides further support for the work of Rajala et al. (2024). More widely, the study results relate to conceptual works on public accountability (e.g., Mulgan, 2000; Coy et al., 2001; Bovens, 2007) and, especially, to works considering hybridity in public accountability (e.g., Fimreite & Læg Reid, 2009; Benish & Matei, 2020; Rajala & Kokko, 2022). Compared to the hybrid modes of accountability in Rajala et al. (2024), the observed hybridity within market-based accountability was more sequential and segmented: the teachers assigned distinct roles, reporting practices, dialogues, and consequences to different account holders, each served at different time points. In contrast, Rajala et al.’s (2024) welfare alliance featured tailor-made roles, reporting practices, dialogues, and

consequences designed to serve all key account holders simultaneously. Based on these findings, the author calls for further research into different forms of hybridity within higher education accountability processes.

The chapter highlighted that teachers working in both commercialized executive programs and degree programs experience greater hybridity in market-based accountability than those teaching only in degree programs. The results reveal both shared and individual perceptions of hybridity. This observation supports Cummings and Anton's (1990) view that similarities may exist in how accountability is experienced. At the same time, the results confirm the core message of felt accountability literature: accountability is a unique and personal experience that differs for each individual (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). Based on these results, practitioners introducing market-based accountability must also consider how individual experiences of hybridity impact teaching. The study raises an important question for future research: What are the implications of similarities and differences in experienced hybridity for teaching practices and learning outcomes?

This study suggests that similarly experienced problems of hybridity raise university-level issues requiring professional remedies throughout the organization. One such unresolved issue is how teachers across the university can balance high ambitions for learning outcomes with student (customer) satisfaction in executive and degree programs. High course ambitions have triggered administrative interventions in degree programs due to low satisfaction. Some teachers have been removed from executive programs for setting overly demanding outcomes. In this context, students seeking good grades or easy passes incentivize teachers to lower competence requirements. High learning standards can reduce student satisfaction, which may negatively impact teachers as profession. At the case university, inflated grades have been a long-standing ethical concern for teachers. The fear is that students earn high marks too easily, creating an illusion of competence while limiting student development. Balancing between high ambitions for learning and student satisfaction seemed to raise contradictory feelings in teachers.

Otherwise, hybridity within market-based accountability was seen as beneficial for student learning. The hybridity allowed tailor-made studies for different student groups and their specific needs.

Another implication of similarly experienced hybridity is that teachers adopt common approaches to manage it, specifically simplification and amplification mechanisms. Simplification was guided by the meta-mechanism of *selectiveness* and amplification by *deliberate emphasis*.

Differences in experienced hybridity influenced how frequently specific simplification and amplification mechanisms were used by the teachers.

Compared to those who only taught, teachers with administrative roles used more negotiation as an amplification mechanism and less delegation and reductionism as simplification mechanisms. Some teachers reported negotiations as intense and high-pressure, while others did not. Other mechanisms primarily enhanced work well-being because they reduced work or uncertainty. Addressing hybridity was not typically seen as emotionally or duty-wise burdensome because different accountabilities were seen as aligned and synergetic.

While previous studies have discussed segmentation, reductionism, and assimilation (Skelcher & Rathgeb-Smith, 2015; Ferry et al., 2024), simplification mechanisms like categorization, standardization, temporal simplification, and filtration have not been addressed (e.g., Benish & Matei, 2020; Rajala & Kokko, 2022). Amplification mechanisms such as filtration, mediation, and negotiation also remain unexplored. Future research could examine in greater detail the benefits and drawbacks of these mechanisms in higher education teaching.

Overall, the study results indicate that teachers as profession face strong market-based accountability at the case university. This contrasts with the weaker market accountability observed in China by Song and Lai (2019). Nordic managerialism emphasizes market principles, as noted by Hansen et al. (2019).

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Increased Hybridity in the Policy Governing Academic Leadership Positions

The Role of Head of Department in Swedish Public Universities

Tina Hedmo and Caroline Waks

Abstract

The hybridity of the role played by university heads of departments has increased over the years. The managers in these positions must manoeuvre among strategic, administrative and academic roles, functions and tasks to such an extent that the question is whether hybridity has come to be seen as an integrated element in the role description for this position. If such is the case – that is, if hybrid professionalism has become a ‘recipe’ for appropriate management – this might explain why the role expectations for heads of departments continue to expand. In this chapter, we investigate what and how role expectations are being expressed in the formal policy documents of public universities in Sweden. We understand the concept of hybrid professionalism as being part of a translation process that is materialised in policy documents. The study concludes that the role hybridity of the department head position seems to have become part of its template. Department heads have always played a hybrid role involving both academic and managerial tasks; in this study, however, we show how – on top of strategic, administrative and academic role expectations – other expectations such as protecting governmental core values and the concept of co-workership have been added. These additional expectations potentially create a ‘hybridity overload’ in the form of both an extended number of work tasks department heads are expected to complete and an extensive range of types of expertise these managers are expected to possess.

Keywords

hybrid universities – hybrid position – role expectations – head of department – co-workership – academic leadership

1 Introduction

The ‘managerial turn’ (Krücken et al., 2013) in European higher education systems has shifted academic leadership positions towards being more management-oriented, professionalised and ‘business-like’. Numerous empirical studies reveal how the consequences of academic ‘managerialisation’ have created a path for a de-collegialisation or weakening of the role and influence of the academic workforce in university governance and decision-making processes. Instead, we find a stronger vertical chain of command (cf. Ahlbäck Öberg et al., 2016; Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2023). Rhoades and Sporn (2002) argue that the expansion of more ‘professionalised’ models of management has resulted in a proliferation of permanent, full-time executive managers with increased power vis-à-vis the academic staff, and Meek et al. (2010) have found a radical increase in the number of management titles and positions in universities.

However, although today’s higher education is largely influenced by managerial values and governance ideals, these have not altogether replaced previous bureaucratic and collegial ideals and practices. Instead, university managers at all levels must cope with and manage an increasing institutional pluralism (Kraatz & Block, 2008, 2017), which has made scholars refer to them as ‘hybrid professionals’ (Giacomelli, 2020) with positions characterised by ‘hybridity’ (Pekkola et al., 2022). Some describe the activities of hybrid professionals as attempts to manage institutional complexity (cf. Noordegraaf, 2007; Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Spyridonidis & Currie, 2016). Others go further, arguing that professionalism itself has changed. Noordegraaf (2015) discusses a new type of ‘organising’ professionalism based on both professional and managerial principles. If professionals in management positions were previously required to contribute to management through their core expertise (in a sort of pure professionalism), they are now able to draw on their role as hybrid professionals and make decisions based on knowledge from several different areas of expertise. In this way, ‘organizing becomes a normal part of professional work’ (Ibid. 2015, p. 187). Whether this is a fact or not is an empirical question; however, the purpose of this chapter is to study whether this is an idea ‘whose time has come’ (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 44; Czarniawska, 2014) and that has been made into a template or ‘recipe’ (Christensen et al., 2007) for university management.

We investigate academic leadership at the level of the department. As a professor or PhD graduate in a management position, the head of a department could be defined as a hybrid professional and is as such ‘engaged in managing professional work, professional colleagues and other staff’ (McGivern et al., 2015, p. 412). In the higher education hierarchy, department heads are the formal managers closest to academic work practices; as such, they have been

described as being in a difficult position, unable to fully perform their roles. Empirical studies highlight how the role of department head has become increasingly demanding and complex in nature over time (De Boer & Goedegebuure 2009, Engwall & Lindvall Eriksson, 2012). These leaders seem to spend more and more time on the articulation of missions, objectives and strategies. In addition, they find themselves trapped by different internal and external preferences and value systems – a situation that creates an inherent imbalance (Kallenberg, 2007) and overlap (Schneijderberg & Merkator, 2012) between their strategic, administrative and academic roles, functions and tasks. It thus appears that there is a gap between the types of role expectations placed on heads of departments and these leaders' conditions for performing organising professionalism. Here, we investigate this issue further and ask, has hybridity come to be seen as an integrated element in the role template of the work of heads of departments in public universities? And, if so, how is this being articulated?

In this chapter, we describe and analyse the types of role expectations formal university policy documents express regarding the position of head of department, in the context of public universities in Sweden. Within the Swedish context, the governance of universities and university departments has traditionally involved a type of hybridity – initially influenced by the idea of collegiality and *primus inter pares*, but also including clear bureaucratic elements, since universities are public authorities. In recent years, however, demands have emerged for more management-oriented leadership at all levels of the university (cf. Sandstedt, 2013).

This chapter is structured as follows. We start by introducing the concept of institutional pluralism, followed by a discussion of department heads being part of a hybrid setting and their role as hybrid professionals. To analyse whether and how ideas about hybrid academic leadership have become an integrated template in university policy documents, we understand the idea of 'appropriate' leadership as being part of a translation process, including the importance of context and context-dependent editing rules that affect the translation process. We do not study the translation process itself but rather its outcome as it has been materialised in policy documents. Using translation theory in this way enables us to describe and analyse the template for 'appropriate' academic leadership and examine whether it includes an expectation for managers to act as hybrids. This also allows us to get a sense of how different professional groups with different professional norm systems and agendas have influenced and formulated the role expectations for university department heads, although we do not investigate this topic in detail here.

Next, we introduce our study design and present the context of higher education in Sweden. Contemporary duties of heads of departments and expectations of their role are explored through an analysis of formal working orders, local policy documents and guidelines for management/leadership and co-workership at public universities in Sweden. The study concludes that – contrary to expectations – such policy documents express role hybridity rather than task clarity. Previously more peripheral or less-articulated role expectations, such as the importance of governmental core values, as well as newer expectations involving trust and co-workership, have been added on top of other, more traditional expectations. The perception of the head of department as a hybrid position has thus become part of the template for this position, which explains why the task expectations for the head of department continue to increase.

2 The Construction of Academic Leadership

2.1 *Parallel Governing Ideals and Professional Norm Systems in the University*

The university is a setting characterised by an institutional pluralism (Kraatz & Block, 2008, 2017) that covers different types of governance ideals. The norm of collegiality is a fundamental component of university governance. Formal structures for collegial decision-making (i.e. academic senates and faculty boards), elected leaders in accordance with the principle of *primus inter pares*, and the use of peer reviews for quality control are considered to be the main elements of collegiality. Collegiality is also built upon a special norm system for work activities: a set of shared norms advocating meritocracy, shared responsibility and collegial discussions based on professional discretion – all for the purpose of a refined production of scientific knowledge (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). In parallel with the collegial governance ideal, traditional bureaucratic ideals of rules and regulations to uphold the rule of law play an important role in higher education governance. In addition, the idea of constructing more ‘complete’ organisations, with a distinct identity, hierarchy and rationality, has propelled many reforms in the public sector (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). Moreover, in the wake of new public management (NPM) reforms in the late 1980s, public universities have been influenced by new-managerialism ideals and techniques involving more hands-on management and a focus on efficiency, excellence, flexibility and external accountability (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Teelken, 2012a, b).

2.2 *Hybrid Universities*

As a consequence of the institutional and multifaceted norms embedded within them, universities 'are considered to be prime examples of hybrid organizations' (Lepori, 2016, p. 246). Jongbloed (2015) argues that European universities could be understood as hybrid organisations using hybrid models for governance (i.e., governmental regulation and market forces). The increased amount of private research funding and university–industry cooperation have multiplied the stakeholder demands a university needs to manage. Focusing on the multiple identities of higher education organisations, Winter and Bolden (2020) claim that universities are hybrid organisations with a mix of 'competing utilitarian (managerial) and normative (professional) beliefs and values systems that challenge the existence of a unitary, fixed or stable cultural identity (Foreman & Whetten, 2002)' (ibid., p. 169).

In an institutional analysis of higher education, Lepori (2016) argues that hybridity could serve as a management solution and strategy for managing institutional pressures and potential conflicts, and that the traditional collegial norm systems of the university have sometimes been protected through 'selective coupling models'. For instance, universities have opted out of certain management practices that are in direct opposition to collegiality while adopting other practices that are not in direct conflict with this type of professional logic.

2.3 *Hybrid Professionals, Positions and Work*

In this chapter, we argue that managers in academia can be conceptualised as hybrid professionals, referring to professionals that have gained experience in other knowledge areas, in addition to their original expertise (Kurunmäki, 2004). A medical doctor practicing medicine while simultaneously working as a clinic manager (cf. Burgess & Currie, 2017) is a typical example of a hybrid professional. Previous research has referred to the work of hybrid professionals as 'knowledge brokering' (Currie, Burgess & Hayton, 2015; Kislov, Hodgson & Boaden, 2016), 'boundary work' (Ong, 1998) or 'translational work' (Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Spyridonidis & Currie, 2016), suggesting that these professionals use their intermediate positions to manage and support change by connecting, recombining and translating managerial and professional knowledge across different individuals and groups within and outside the organisation. Pekkola et al. (2022) define hybridity at the level of work descriptions and positions as a combination of academic, administrative and managerial roles and identities. These researchers conducted a comparative analysis of higher education in Finland, Sweden and Norway and concluded that the three contexts shared both similarities and differences. One difference was that the hybrid positions in Sweden were more managerial than those in Finland and Norway.

2.4 *Constructing the Role of Head of Department as a State in a Translation Process*

In the literature, an assortment of ‘recipes’ for how to manage and lead properly (Christensen et al., 2007) have been circulating in the public sector since the introduction of private-sector-inspired reforms in the early 1980s. In organisational institutionalism, the circulation and adoption of popular management ideas have been understood as ongoing translation processes in which the attributes of an idea are being created, negotiated and recreated as the idea travels in time and space (cf. Sahlin-Andersson & Engvall, 2002; Wedlin & Sahlin, 2008). Such processes include the materialisation of an idea into an object (e.g., a policy document), which is translated into actions, repeated and stabilised into an institution; when re-embedded into a new setting, it is viewed as a ‘new’ idea, which then becomes subject to new translations. The more people are involved in the translation process, the more energy the idea gains, and the more diffused and powerful it will become.

The idea of appropriate academic leadership and its specific meaning can thus be understood as an expression of a specific occasion in the translation process – that is, as an idea ‘whose time/space has come’ (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 44). However, translations are not completely open-ended. Rather, implicit editing rules guide the process (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017), and, when a specific idea travels and is adopted into an organisation, it will also encounter other ideas. Wedlin and Sahlin (2017) argue based on the concept of ‘ecologies of translation’ and explain how a multitude of ideas interplay, mix and can potentially reinforce each other in processes of translation. In university settings, several governance ideals – as well as a growing number of different professional groups carrying different sets of rationales – interplay and influence how academic leadership is made sense of (cf. Pallas, Fredriksson & Wedlin, 2016). Universities are populated not only by those in the academic profession but also by support staff professionals (e.g., HR and communication professionals) that are involved in professionalisation projects of their own. These non-academic professionals make sense of what constitutes a ‘proper’ academic leadership through their own specific norm systems and thus have the potential to shape translation processes.

During times of considerable change and reform, hybridity becomes more legitimate (Battilana, Besharov, & Mitzinneck, 2017, p. 142), which might open up a window in the translation process to blend elements from different ideals. In the setting of Swedish university governance, for example, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2024) show that organisational and leadership criteria are being integrated into research assessments of Swedish universities and are sometimes given a status superior to that of science, thus a sign of collegiality being ‘watered down’.

To sum up, higher education is a setting of high institutional pluralism, which has increased the level of hybridity in managerial positions. To analyse the types of expertise the managers of university departments are expected to possess, we view policies for leadership as ideas that are part of a translation process. The translation process is not totally open-ended, as it is guided by editing rules specific to the university context. We do not study the process itself but rather its outcome, which we understand as a temporary state in the process, materialised in the contemporary policy documents of public universities. However, the fact that the translation is part of a process means that new elements or role expectations regarding what should constitute the role of a head of department can be added onto previous expectations. This may explain why academic managers sometime feel caught in the crossfire of multiple expectations. While we do not examine the consequences this may have for the activities of heads of departments, such consequences are worthy of further reflection.

3 Method

The research context of this study is the population of Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs). While this context covers a large number of various forms of HEIs, we focus solely on public universities, as they are exposed to greater institutional complexity than other kinds of HEIs. Public universities are not simply pure HEIs; they are hybrid organisations. They do not only have to be responsive to the ideals and regulatory frameworks that are specific to the higher education sector; as governmental agencies, they are also embedded in a context governed by ideals, norms and rules that are common to all organisations producing and supplying public goods and services in the public sector. Following major university reforms, and especially in the wake of the Autonomy reform in 2011, Swedish HEIs in general – and public universities in particular – have been subjected to pervasive changes in terms of deregulation and decentralisation. As a result, universities now have the discretion to independently structure and govern their internal organisation by themselves, including the formulation and implementation of internal regulatory frameworks conditioning the role and function of academic leaders.

Our choice of sample of public universities (inspired by the study of Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2023) includes a wide array of universities, from large old universities with strong roots in collegial norms and ideals to younger universities sharing a history as former university branches or university colleges and specialised universities of applied sciences (Table 11.1). The large old

TABLE 11.1 Public universities in Sweden

Old universities	New universities	Universities of applied sciences
Uppsala University (UU) (1477–)	Karlstad University (KaU) (1999–)	Karolinska Institute, KI (1810–)
Lund University (LU) (1666–)	Linné University (LnU) (2010–)	The Royal Technical University (KTH) (1827–)
Göteborg University (GU) (1891–)	Örebro University (ORU) (1999–)	Luleå Technical University (LtU) (1971–)
Stockholm University (SU) (1960–)	Mid Sweden University (MiUn) (2005–)	Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences (SLU) (1977–)
Umeå University (UmU) (1965–)	Malmö University (MaU) (2018–)	
Linköping University (LiU) (1975–)	Mälardalen University (MdU) (2022–)	

universities, such as Uppsala University, Lund University and Gothenburg University, encompass several faculties in different scientific areas such as medicine, the natural sciences, the humanities and the social sciences, whereas the younger universities and universities of applied sciences incorporate just a few faculties.

The university departments, which are organised as part of the faculties, are the key units of Swedish universities' core operations. These units provide education at a basic, advanced and PhD level, as well as performing basic and applied research. They also have a third mission, as they collaborate with external stakeholders in the surrounding environment.

The university departments at Sweden's public universities vary in number and size. LU has the largest number of university departments in the sample ($n = 62$), followed by UU ($n = 54$) and SU ($n = 51$). In contrast, the younger universities have fewer departments. The size of the departments also varies among the different universities. Higher education reforms in the 1990s caused university departments to merge into larger basic units (Boberg, 2022). GU, SU and LiU are three examples of universities that organise their core operations through large-scale and multidisciplinary departments. Still, most university departments are organised in rather small and single-disciplinary units, especially in

the medical sciences (SOU, 2015, p. 92). More recently, the university departments at some universities have been challenged and even replaced by new forms of structural arrangements, such as academies and operating faculties. For example, the core operations of MdU are offered by academies and led by academic managers (*akademischefer*) (Boberg, 2022).

In Sweden, as in other national contexts, university departments are not only the workplace for academic professionals doing academic work; they also contain a growing number of administrators supporting the management and operations at the local level in functional areas such as course administration, finance, HR and IT.

3.1 *Data Collection*

We explore expectations regarding the role of heads of departments through a qualitative analysis of formal and internal policy documents at Swedish public universities. Coffey (2017) argues that it is difficult to understand higher education more generally and 'academic work' in particular without studying their 'documentary realities'; in line with this argument and those of other scholars (Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2023), we claim that formal policy documents are valuable and reliable data sources for exploring role expectations at public universities.

The universities are governed and managed through several policy documents. We have selected three forms of policy documents that we argue are crucial for answering our research question properly: namely, work orders, delegation orders and formal policies for management/leadership. These documents explicitly express what is expected of those who hold a position of academic leadership, including what tasks and obligations the position entails and how these should be carried out.

The work and delegation orders and policy documents in the sample were systematically gathered, compiled and processed through a web-based study carried out during 2022–2024. These documents are public and are largely available on the universities' websites on the Internet. A few documents were also gathered through direct contact with HR specialists at individual universities by e-mail or phone early in 2024. All documents are contemporary and currently applied in the governance of the universities.

3.1.1 *Work and Delegation Orders*

Internal work and delegation orders are formal rules that are formulated, decided and implemented by the university boards and the Vice-Chancellors as a response to specific paragraphs in Sweden's Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance. As such, they are the outcome of an established

order that is carried out by the university management. These orders constitute what could be labelled as 'hard rules', as the university management is forced to establish and comply with them. The documents also express the role of the academic leaders, covering how the responsibility for decision-making is internally delegated and the specific tasks of academic leaders, including the heads of departments.

3.1.2 Internal Policy Documents

University-specific policy documents and guidelines for management/leadership are our main sources of data. While the work and delegation orders stipulate what the academic managers *should* do in their role as formal managers at that university in general, the policies express what is expected of these managers in terms of how good and appropriate leadership should be practiced. As such, the policies articulate the objectives, values and expectations for university leadership in greater detail. Unlike the work and delegation orders, the policies can be viewed as 'soft rules', as they are not legally binding and have no formal sanctions if not complied with. The policies are not independent steering documents; rather, they supplement current laws, agreements and other governing documents both within and external to the universities.

In line with our social constructivist view on reality (Berger & Luckman, 1979), we do not view the policy documents as given but as constructions and outcomes of social translation processes. Thus, we interpret the documents as 'social constructs' that are produced, used and shared in socially organised ways (Coffey, 2017). Methodologically, we approached the documents as texts and as representations of the practical accomplishments involved in their production. We did not analyse the processes of the production of the documents *per se*, but we view the documents as the products and manifestations of such processes. The constructions of these policies have been preceded by internal audit processes and/or university-based inquiries or action programmes focusing on the specific context of heads of departments. Such audits were conducted by internal audit units at UU, UmU, MaU and SLU in the 2000s. As described in the written reports, an overall purpose of these processes was to assess whether the heads of departments have sufficient conditions and administrative support to manage their tasks properly and strategically in order to achieve the mission of the universities. Among other things, the objective of the audits has been to submit proposals for changes and organisational actions in order to clarify and improve the conditions, continued direction and development of the head of department's role to make it clearer and more attractive.

In general, the processes of formulating leadership policies can be described as inclusive and anchored in the entire organisation of the university in order

to gain legitimacy. In many cases, a number of workshops have been arranged with representatives drawn from various levels and administrative and academic functions and units in order to capture and consider different views and thoughts. In general, the HR departments of individual universities are commissioned by the central university administration manager to develop and to be responsible for these policies. Table 11.2 outlines the policies we gathered, compiled and processed.

TABLE 11.2 Policies for leadership and co-workership at Swedish public universities

University	Policies for leadership	Policies for co-workership
Uppsala University (UU)	n/a	UFV 2021/1066 (2021)
Lund University (LU)	Reg No STYR 2023/2758 (2023) Reg No STYR 2023/2803 (2023)	n/a
Gothenburg University (GU)	n/a	n/a
Stockholm University (SU)	SU 814-0915-12 (2013)	n/a
Umeå University (UmU)	Reg No FS 1.1.-2713-21 (2021)	Reg No FS 1.1.-1048-22 (2022)
Linköping University (LiU)	n/a	n/a
Karlstad University (KaU)	Reg No C2023/120 (2023)	Reg No C2023/120 (2023)
Linné University (LnU)	n/a	n/a
Örebro University (OrU)	Reg No ORU 2019/05029 (2019)	Reg No ORU 2019/05029 (2019)
Mid Sweden University (MiUn)	n/a	n/a
Malmö University (MaU)	n/a	n/a
Mälardalen University (MdU)	n/a	n/a
Karolinska Institute (KI)	Reg No 1-76/2022 (2022)	Reg No 1-76/2022 (2022)
Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)	Reg No 2019-0009 (2019)	Reg No V-2019-0013 (2019)
Luleå Technical University (LtU)	Reg No 2050-14 (2014)	Reg No 2050-14 (2014)
Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences (SLU)	Reg No SLU ua 213.1.1.1- 5596 (2013)	Reg No SLU ua 213.1.1.1- 5596 (2013)

As shown in Table 11.2, many of the universities established specific policies for leadership during 2013–2024, while other universities are starting to or have an interest in doing so (i.e. LiU). On the other hand, GU argues that the university is decentralised and there is no shared interest to establish a specific central policy for leadership at the moment.¹

In addition, a growing number of universities have formulated specific policies for co-workership or plan to do so in the near future (i.e. SLU). In most cases, these are integrated with the policies for leadership/management (i.e. SU, OrU, KaU and KI). At UmU and KTH, on the other hand, these policies are integrated as sub-sections of general HR policies in areas such as competence and career development.

3.2 *Data Analysis*

The policy documents were analysed using a reflexive, flexible and open-ended approach in order to explore the tasks and expectations articulated in the content of the investigated policy documents. This was done through a qualitative content analysis (Coffey, 2017; Schreier, 2017).

In line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model of data analysis, we looked for patterns and themes on the basis of our conceptual framework, while remaining responsive to new themes emerging from the data. Therefore, we used a combination of concept-driven and data-driven themes and categories in our coding scheme. We started by closely reading the content of the documents in order to identify the sets of tasks (academic, administrative and managerial) and types of expertise these managers were expected to possess at the various universities. We found it essential to have a flexible and open mindset in relation to our empirical data in order to avoid ignoring any valuable and useful data in the content of the documents. In this way, we discovered the manifestation of the idea and value of 'co-workership' in our data – a concept that could be considered peripheral in the practice of Swedish academic leadership until now. Through an iterative process (Coffey, 2017; Schreier, 2017), we repeated the steps of reading, coding and interpreting, modifying the coding frame in the process.

4 Higher Education and the Role of Heads of Departments in Sweden

In Sweden, the higher education system has changed over time in response to a series of political reforms. The 1977 higher education reform radically changed the system, with increased centralisation, uniformity and expansion. The tasks of heads of departments and the department board were specified in a new

higher education act (1977, p. 218). The reform broke down the professor's influential role as the leader of a university department in the Swedish context; consequentially, the professors largely lost interest in the position, and the status of the head of department declined. Instead, the head's role came to be regarded as a sort of conscription assignment that circulated between the lecturers at a department (HSV, 2002). The position was designed as a temporary assignment that could be carried out on a part-time basis in order to not interfere with the lecturers' main duties as researchers and teachers. The heads of departments were appointed internally within the department through collegiate election procedures, with a requirement for the position (and one that largely remains) being scientific competence (Sandstedt, 2013)

In the wake of the pervasive NPM wave in the 1990s, the higher education sector in Sweden passed from rule-based and detailed management to management through objectives and results. The changed form of governance included a strengthening of various forms of 'ex post control' such as follow-up, accounting and reporting. The sector-specific higher education reform in 1993 brought a decentralisation of the Swedish higher education sector. Established traditions provided little guidance when the universities were suddenly faced with the task of designing their own organisation, distribution of responsibilities and decision-making order.

The new 1993 higher education regulation also brought new requirements and expectations for the heads of departments (Eriksson, 1997). A follow-up of the reform (RUT-93) reported that the heads of departments were surprised by the changed demands on leadership, while their colleagues at the departments found it difficult to accept that new conditions had been established. The report also emphasised that the recruitment of academic leaders needed to be developed and that a stronger and more management-oriented leadership was required at all levels within the university (Sandstedt, 2013). Leadership was presented as a new academic profession, which was partly at odds with the traditional collegial view of academic leaders as *primus inter pares*. The reform follow-up emphasised that it was important that the holder of the position of head of department be given real opportunities to meet the new and increased demands.

As a result, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (*Högskoleverket*, HSV) received an instruction from the Ministry of Education in 1995 to promote management development at universities. To avoid risking the re-centralisation of the higher education system, the HSV recommended that the university management of HEIs should make efforts to achieve this goal at the local level. It was considered the university principal's task to be responsible for managerial development at each respective HEI. In response, a number of

HEIS built up and strengthened their initiatives for leadership and manager development at the local level, emphasising the provision of training and support for newly appointed heads of departments. However, many universities made no significant systematic efforts to promote such a development at that time (HSV, 2002).

As the higher education sector grew in size and scope, heads of departments' areas of responsibility expanded significantly during the 2000s, as shown by several studies and investigations (e.g., Engwall & Lindvall Eriksson, 2012). One explanation is that many university departments were merged into larger multidisciplinary units. In addition, the requirements for explicit action programmes and the reporting of implemented measures and achieved results have been strengthened in recent years. In the wake of the 2011 Autonomy reform and a more general expansion of the university, the variety and complexity of university governance – and forms of management across Sweden – has been increasing, which is perceived as problematic. In particular, the universities' self-governance or collegial forms of governance have been questioned in state reports and at the central level of HEIS. Instead, a strengthened vertical chain of command has been advocated, in which the head of department plays a key role.

In general, the head is responsible for the department's core operations, which include teaching, research and (to an increasing degree) administration. In addition, in the wake of the Autonomy reform, it is expected that strong and strategic leaders should be able to handle HEIS' societal development, profiling and national and international competition (SOU, 2015:92). In practice, academic leadership thus often involves a complex mix of tasks the heads of department have little experience with and that exceeds their part-time assignment. Jensen (2020) believes that, while there are many ideas about what academic leadership is, it is in fact a 'masked term' that hides the fact that the position of head of department is more about administration and conflict management than it appears. This argument is greatly supported by previous research and investigations that have demonstrated how, in practice, heads of departments spend a considerable part of their work on daily routines and activities, including discussions, social interactions, administration and meetings (see e.g., Engwall & Lindvall Eriksson, 2012). It is often difficult to reconcile the multiple expectations for heads of departments (Eriksson, 1997; Haake, 2004), which is captured in the following government bill:

Academic leadership is based on scientific freedom, the collegial structure and that universities and colleges are public authorities in the service of democracy and the state. (Proposition 2001/02:15, 'The open university', p. 151)

In light of what has been argued above, university heads of departments find themselves caught between different demands and expectations, which make the conditions for academic leadership diffuse and ambiguous (Eriksson, 1997; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2020; Gjerde & Benner, 2020; Jensen, 2020). Discussions and expectations on academic leadership and its role and meaning occur in multiple arenas, both within the universities and in public and political debates. As an illustration, the position and tasks of heads of departments as academic leaders have triggered a series of public investigations and the publication of handbooks on academic leadership in general (Norén & Wallin, 2019) and the role of heads of departments in particular (Risling & Edenius, 2019). In addition, as state universities are public-sector organisations, they are influenced by expectations and governance changes in the public sector more generally. In 2016, for instance, the Swedish Agency for Public Management (*Statskontoret*) was commissioned by the Swedish Government to map out and analyse the state governance of public operations, including all state universities (Statskontoret, 2016). Their work resulted in a report called 'Improved Co-workership and Leadership in the State' (our translation). This report was later picked up by many universities, which started to map out their activities; still later, the universities established their own leadership policies to clarify the leadership role/assignment of heads of departments. Thus, aside from public governance, individual universities also attempt to locally determine – and probably largely influence – what the role of a head of department might look like. This occurs through different types of formal work regulations, policy documents, training programmes and recommendations. This perspective will form the locus of the empirical study of the paper coming next.

5 Role Expectations for Heads of Departments at Swedish Public Universities

Working and delegation orders are central in university governance in Sweden. In brief, they articulate the university's overall internal organisation, division of labour, principles for delegation of decision-making and responsibility, how certain matters should be managed (e.g., the election processes of formal managers) and the general forms of operations. The orders are rather similar in how they are framed at the various universities. They are often introduced by articulating which legislation applies and which decision-making rights are delegated to the various bodies and functions within the universities, including the heads of departments. There are also variations, especially in how the universities express their academic values. Some universities introduce their

orders by declaring the importance and value of collegiality as a norm, culture and governing principle. For instance, both GU and UmU explicitly articulate that the collegial structure is a key condition for quality and renewal. Paradoxically, their working orders also express that the traditional and hierarchical chain of command that is running in parallel with the collegial structure is essential. The orders argue that it is impossible to separate the collegial and hierarchical structures in a simple way, as they constitute two sides of the same coin. The solution is rather to achieve a reasonable balance between them.

Concentrating on the role of the head of department, there is also a variation in how this formal role is portrayed in these orders. For instance, the working orders at the MiUn, LtU, SLU and KI point out a long series of specific obligations that are expected of their heads of departments in areas such as organisation and administration, education (at the basic, advanced and PhD levels), economy and personnel administration, whereas the working orders at universities such as GU, UU, OrU, LnU, KaU and KTH only briefly address the responsibilities and tasks of the heads of departments. That said, a common expression is that the head of the department is the formal manager at the departmental level and represents the department internally at the university and externally towards stakeholders. The Vice-Chancellors (and deans) delegate the overall responsibility for operations at the departmental level to the heads. Among other things, this means that the head of department should guarantee that research and education are conducted at a high-quality level. In addition, the head should promote the department's third mission of collaboration with the surrounding society. The heads of departments are also responsible for the economy and finances of the departments, HR issues regarding academic and administrative employees, the work environment, and ensuring that the daily operations at the department are run smoothly in accordance with formal rules and regulations. In some cases, it is argued that the head is also responsible for developing the department. In the working order of MiUn, for instance, it is articulated that the head is responsible for the overall business planning and long-term priorities at the departmental level.

The content of the work and delegation orders defines the formal position of heads of departments as academic managers. It is argued, however, that this is insufficient to influence the activities of the university. What is needed is good leadership as defined and explained in local policies.

5.1 *A Move towards a Stronger Vertical Chain of Command, Or ...?*

Most of the leadership policies state that they are intended to clarify the responsibility, expectations and demands placed on formal managers at the university in general, including the heads of departments. The aim is to define

the competences and capabilities that characterise successful and appropriate leadership. The majority of the policy documents express and emphasise the heads' obligation in relation to the hierarchy and the employer, rather than the collegium. A common expression is that the head should act on behalf of the employer. In the leadership policies at SLU and UmU, it is expressed that, even though the heads of departments are elected through a collegial procedure, the heads should represent the employer and, as such, operate in accordance with the vertical chain of command. Similar arguments were found in the leadership policy at LU, in which it is expressed that the head of department's assignment as manager is divided into three basic roles: the role as leader, the role as employer, and the role as operational manager. The role as employer indicates that the head of department – in the capacity as a manager within a public authority – represents the employer, and thus must comply with applicable laws and regulations and support and follow central and local governing documents. The head is supposed to 'execute' the decisions made by formal managers further up in the vertical chain of command.

However, more recently, an opposite development was distinguished at LU, where specific policies have been formulated and implemented for what characterises a distinct academic leadership. These policies are argued to complement the leadership policy; their stated aim is to reinforce and protect collegiality and academic values and principles, which are unique and central for academic leadership at the university. In this case, there are multiple expectations for academic leadership, as the university embraces a well-developed strategic approach (while simultaneously cherishing daily practices) to be able to communicate externally and internally, to understand the university's surroundings at both a national and international level, to have integrity and the courage to make decisions and, finally, to have the ability to balance the different parts of academic leadership in term of collegiality and hierarchy.

5.2 *A Focus on 'Co-Workership'*

In the policy documents, it appears that the role of head of department is still largely about managing both daily and complex HR issues. More broadly, it is explicitly articulated that being a head of a department is largely about managing 'employees'. In LU's policy for leadership, for instance, it is prescribed that an important role as formal manager of the university is to promote a working climate that favours independent thinking and development. It is also important to make use of the employees' competence, experience and commitment. A manager is expected to support the employees' development of skills and competences as part of the development of the department's or unit's operations. In their role as 'operational' managers, the heads of departments at LU

are also expected to plan, implement, follow up and continuously develop the operations at the department together with the employees.

At a number of universities, in parallel with the development towards a stronger and more salient leadership, specific policies for 'co-workship' (*medarbetarskap*) have been formulated. These policies express that it is not only good leadership that is strategically important for their universities (e.g., UmU, KaU and SLU); clear 'co-workship' is also a condition for good leadership. A good leadership and co-workship are hence declared as being significant for achieving the vision and goals of the university as a whole. Similar to the policies for leadership, most of the policies for co-workship are introduced by stating that the university is a governmental agency and, further, that the policies are based on the governmental core values. In most cases, the policies for co-workship cover a broad range of issues. Among other things, they state that the employees are responsible for keeping themselves up-to-date on their area of expertise. The employees are also expected to contribute to a good working climate for the university as a whole, an open and constructive dialogue across and within professional and operational boundaries and the development of a trust-based culture.

As an example similar to other policies, the co-workship policy at UU expresses the centrality of governmental values; in parallel, however, it also emphasises the importance of the traditional academic values of collegiality. The policy concerns all employees at the university, regardless of occupational position. Thus, academic colleagues and administrative support staff are categorised as 'co-workers'. Even the heads of departments at the university are included in this category, albeit with a special responsibility for the operations and employees of their respective departments. Furthermore, the policy states that all employees have a shared responsibility for the university's work environment and for creating favourable conditions for the university's overall mission. The employees are also expected to respect the fact that their managers have been delegated the responsibility to make decisions and to lead and distribute the work within the framework of the conditions that prevail in the workplace. A specific section in the policy is allocated to the managers at UU; among other things, they are expected to act as role models, show trust in employees and safeguard employees' commitment, initiatives and ideas. In addition, managers are expected to act promptly and respectfully when problems arise and to seek support if necessary.

In the case of SLU, the policy states that a successful university requires competent, engaged and involved employees who are willing to actively contribute to the development of the university and to a good working climate. A series of points indicate the expectations placed on the employees from SLU's

perspective, such as 'seeing their own role and mission in relation to SLU as a whole' and being '[...] loyal to agreements and decisions made'. The same kinds of expressions were found in other policy documents.

The internal investigations that earlier identified the need for formulating and designing the policies on leadership and co-workership at the various universities were mostly run by representatives from the HR departments at the central level of the universities. The decisions to start these projects were made by Vice-Chancellors and/or university boards, but it was largely the administrators from the central HR departments that led the projects on the local level.

For example, the new guidelines for managerial assignments at LU were the result of a local project titled 'Future Leadership Development', which was led by LU's HR department with the goal of developing a concept proposal for the university's future leadership development. The project resulted in a number of proposals, such as setting up a management platform for leadership development with the aim of providing inspiration, learning and support for managers and leaders at LU. A team in LU's HR department manages the platform with the aim of providing an arena for continuous dialogues on principles for competence development of the leadership role(s) at LU. Another proposal was to update the guidelines for management assignments with a management and leadership policy that applied to all formal managers at LU. The aims of the new guidelines were to clarify what it means to be a manager at LU and to form a basis for the development of new management training courses.

5.3 *A Strengthened Professionalisation of Academic Leadership*

A priority being raised in many of the leadership policies is to strengthen and 'professionalise' the leadership role through well-developed internal leadership education and targeted competence development efforts. The documents also argue that good administrative and organisational support at both the central and local levels is key in the professionalisation of leadership.

The leadership policy at SE expresses that professional leadership is a strategic prerequisite for achieving the university's vision. It is assumed that professional leadership increases the attractiveness of the university as an employer. An ambition of UmU's leadership policy is that the employees at the university should be given the opportunity to develop their leadership and be able to prepare early on in their career for a role as a leader.

The professionalisation efforts of leadership are reflected in the administrative structure of most universities. For instance, the universities in Uppsala, Lund and Linköping have strategically established and developed specific leadership development units that provide a variety of activities to support

and develop the competence and skills of employees holding the position of formal manager or having the ambition to do so.

5.4 *A Unified University with a Strong and Unified Leadership*

A recurrent statement in the documents is that the university is a unified university with a common mission, and that a well-developed and common view on leadership and co-workership is a prerequisite for a well-functioning and proper academic practice. Strong and developed leadership and co-workership are a requirement for the university to realise its vision of being a 'world-class university' (SLU), to achieve success in research and education (LU and SU) or to be attractive as an employer (UmU). The policies also articulate that they apply to everyone with managerial duties at the HEI, not just those appointed as academic leaders. Thus, they do not differentiate between people internally appointed through collegial procedures and those externally recruited or in a part-time or full-time manager role (e.g., LU). They apply to everyone with a management assignment with personnel, operational and budget responsibility.

5.5 *Emphasising the Role of the Head in the Service of the State*

In a number of policy documents, it is articulated that the universities and their managers serve the state. In the leadership policy of SU, for instance, it is expressed that – besides protecting the collegial decision-making system – the academic manager is expected to adhere to the same principles and requirements as other managers in the state administration. The importance of the state sector's common basic values is more or less emphasised across all the university policies. It is expressed that these values – namely, democracy, efficiency, legal security, objectivity and free expression of opinion – are fundamental for practicing good and appropriate leadership at the universities. It is also important that the university – like other public authorities – ensure that its co-workers are informed of and understand these values. (Statskontoret, 2019). For example, the leadership policy at UmU states that a manager must actively work to keep the governmental core values 'alive'. Many policies also express the meaning and importance of the governmental-driven idea of trust. It is argued that trust is a key component of professional leadership, not least in the relationship between leaders and employees. It is also expressed that university managers should work hard to enable trust-based governance across the university (e.g., UmU) or to support a trust-based culture (e.g., KI) in which formal managers and leaders jointly create proper conditions and space for their employees to grow and take responsibility.

6 Conclusions

In this chapter, we investigated the types of role expectations – materialised in both ‘hard’ regulations and ‘softer’ policy documents – that are placed on the heads of departments in Swedish public universities. The investigation showed how these expectations have increased in both scope and content. Although the documents contain descriptions that aim to create a homogeneous and standardised template for the managerial role, the template itself expresses expectations of the management position that are perhaps even more complex than they were before. The role of head of department seems to involve being a collegial leader of peers, a state agent, an employer that trusts co-workers, and a boundary spanner responsible for communicating and upholding relations with the surrounding society. The number of duties has expanded; the head of department is responsible for securing the department’s finances, ensuring the quality of teaching and research, and promoting collaboration with the surrounding society. The head should also ‘serve the state’, keep the governmental core values ‘alive’ and make sure that the department operates in accordance with formal rules and regulations. At the same time, the head should contribute to the university as a whole, develop the department, encourage independent thinking among the employees and attract new ones to the department. The head should also protect the collegial decision-making system and, on top of that, achieve a reasonable balance between the different role expectations. To conclude, it seems as if the pursuit of task clarity has resulted in further role complexity and hybridity – a paradoxical outcome, since the purpose of the policy documents was to clarify what is expected of academic managers.

So, how can we explain this development? We understand the role expectations expressed in the policy documents as part of an ongoing translation process during a certain time and context. The role of a university head of department has always been hybrid, but now additional elements have been added or highlighted. For instance, the expectation to act as a civil servant has been reinforced, as have ideas about mutual trust and co-workership. Different governance ideals thus seem to be at play at the same time, forming an ecology of translation (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017) and potentially creating hybridity and tension.

The vocabulary used in the studied documents breathes a new idea about the university as an institution. The word ‘employee’ and the head of department that acts on behalf of the ‘employer’ and is ‘liable’ to the employees are rather different from traditional ideas about the university as a meritocratic collegium of peers. The concept of co-workership also seems to be a wide concept that could mean different things at different times and in different

settings. This concept has been developed and discussed in the academic literature in Sweden (cf. Hällsten & Tengblad, 2006, Andersson et al., 2020, 2021) and has had a major impact as a practical HR principle, especially in the public sector. It emphasises that employees themselves should be active in leading their own work. Andersson et al. (2021) links it to concepts such as empowerment, followership and 'organisational citizenship behaviour'. In the setting of the university, co-workership was previously referred to as internal representative democracy (Boberg, 2022); today, it is viewed as part of governmental core values and given a different meaning. It thus seems that further investigation of the meaning and implications of co-workership in university governance would be a fruitful path forward.

Another interesting and important question for further research is whether or how heads of departments cope with the type of 'hybridity overload' that the expectations presented in the policy documents seem to imply. We are already witnessing two strategies today. The first is to commit to the type of 'organising professionalism' (Noordegraaf, 2015) that seems to be expected from a reading of the policy documents. Different types of leadership training programmes are already in place in many universities in Sweden, with the aim of promoting a more professionalised leadership role. A second strategy, which is almost the opposite, involves a shared management position in which duties and responsibilities are delegated and tasks are spread out to more than one person. Nevertheless, further studies of actual work practices are required in order to investigate how heads of departments cope and what strategies they choose.

Note

- 1 E-mail correspondence with an HR specialist at GU on 23-11-03.

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As a Dean, You Are Stuck between the Top Management and Academia, a Bit Like the Patty in a Hamburger

Hybrid Roles of Academic Middle Managers in Finnish Universities

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Abstract

Middle managers in universities work in an environment where their institutions face a variety of pressures to change and demands for organisational development. When universities adapt to their changing environments and apply different logics and values in their activities, they are referred to as 'hybrid organisations'. While academic middle managers manage the change in universities, they are also affected by it. They have two roles with specific logics and values: as academic professionals and as managers of the organisation. In this chapter, we explore the work of academic middle managers and the perceptions of deans and heads of departments of the challenges they face in their work within the context of hybrid universities. The data consist of a survey conducted in Finnish universities in 2020 and 2024. The results showed that there are many tensions inherent to the work of university middle managers that reveal the conflicting logics that exist within universities and academic work.

Keywords

universities – hybridity – academic middle managers – academic work – management – professionalism

1 Introduction

Universities are constantly changing. They reflect changes in their societal environment, and, because academic middle managers have central roles within the current university hierarchy, they are at the centre of managing change, and they are also affected by it in many ways.

Universities are expected by the society to have a significant impact on a range of societal challenges and act in responsible ways (Geschwind et al., 2019), such as in relation to sustainability (Cristofolletti & Pinheiro, 2023) and crisis preparedness (Perkins et al., 2024) as well as in terms of the need for efficiency and organisational development (Bleiklie et al., 2017). Here, we focus on the latter, examining how universities are expected to become more 'real' organisations and converge with those in the private sector (Seeber et al., 2015). We also focus on how this expectation affects the work of academic middle managers, particularly in the context of Finnish universities.

Universities constantly apply different logics and values in their operations and are therefore hybrid in their organisational nature (Pekkola et al., 2021). In the context of the evolving societal and organisational pressures that universities face, academic middle managers are confronted with a complex array of competing logics, practices and values. Moreover, the organisational dynamics of universities have undergone a significant transformation, largely driven by managerial trends that emphasise managerial logics. This transformation has led to a centralisation of management and an increase in the authority of academic managers, i.e. academics with a management position, within universities (Santiago & Carvalho, 2010; Pekkola et al., 2018).

Although universities are changing in many ways, they also have a durable 'academic heartland' that is not immediately affected by and is often protected from environmental changes (cf. Clark, 1998). Universities can be analysed as institutions or as organisations. That is, they are institutions with societal functions related to knowledge creation that serve as learning communities. These societal functions are relatively stable, but the organisational dimension of universities is a recent focus of attention that is constantly evolving and influenced by the changing environment, national reforms and management trends (Välimaa, 2022).

This divide into institution and organisation is one central characteristic of universities (Välimaa, 2022). Universities as institutions emphasise their nature as disciplinary communities and their staff as academic professionals guided by professional logics and values. Universities as organisations emphasise their staff as employees who are controlled and supervised by managers and guided by managerial logics (Evetts, 2009; Siekinen et al., 2019). This division creates a constant tension in the work of academic managers, who must be loyal to both their academic and organisational reference groups and to the logics and values that they support and manifest (Pekkola et al., 2018).

This paper examines the grassroots impact of international policy trends that affect higher education by focusing on middle managers in Finnish universities, especially deans and heads of departments. In particular, the new

public management-inspired reforms were codified into legislation relative to Finnish universities by the enactment of University Act 558/2009 in 2010 that made universities legal entities and gave them the right to act as 'real' employers. They were given the autonomy to make organisational decisions and to decide on their own policies for recruiting and managing people (human resource management, HRM) (e.g., Siekkinen et al., 2016).

This 'new university law' has been analysed as a shift towards managerialism in Finnish universities, reducing the power of collegial decision-making bodies such as the university collegium and faculty boards, which include representatives of university staff and students. (Poutanen et al., 2022; Välimaa, 2012). For example, the centralisation of university management has increased the role of managers and academic managers, who tend to also hold professorial positions in universities (Pekkola et al., 2018). However, the role of academic managers, deans and department heads, has remained understudied in Finnish higher education research, and the new roles and positions of deans and other academic managers are still more or less unknown.

This paper addresses a current knowledge gap regarding the concrete influences of public management trends on Finnish higher education in the context of hybrid universities. In this paper, we begin by describing what we mean when we talk about the hybrid roles of managers and hybrid universities. Secondly, we look at how universities have changed and how this has affected the role of middle managers based on the literature. Third, we describe the Finnish context of this study. And, finally, we describe the survey data and discuss and draw conclusions in light of the survey analysis.

The empirical data were collected through surveys of academic middle managers, deans and department heads, employed at Finnish universities. The surveys included both multiple-choice questions (administered in spring 2020) and open-ended questions (administered in spring 2024). The empirical analysis of this paper focuses on the motivations of academic managers as well as the tensions that arise in their managerial roles.

2 Theoretical Backdrop

2.1 *Hybrid Universities and the Hybrid Roles of Middle Managers*

It is first necessary to define the terms 'hybrid universities' and 'hybrid roles of middle managers'. We start by examining the nature of the hybrid university. The concept of the hybrid organisation has been the subject of study in the fields of public administration and organisational studies. Johanson and Vakkuri (2017) presented a framework for managing organisations that are

neither 'private' nor 'public' but rather hybrid in nature (p. 137). The concept of hybridity is defined as an 'impure existence between pure types' (p. 1). It is a combination of disparate and frequently contradictory logics and values that results from the competing attributes inherent to the public and private sectors.

The theory of institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio 1999) explores the reasons behind the diverse behaviours of individuals and organisations in different institutional settings and shows how different – and often conflicting – belief systems shape their identities and guide their decisions and actions. Institutional logics are defined as 'frames of reference that condition actors' choices for sense-making, the vocabulary they use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity' (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 2) and 'as the socially constructed patterns of symbols and material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals and organizations produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality' (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). However, different institutional logics often conflict with each other, e.g., professional and market logic or professional and corporate logic (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012).

Karré (2020) posited that hybridity can combine the optimal elements of disparate models, yet it can also result in organisations that are inherently confused and subject to a multitude of contradictory pressures (p. 31). Gulbrandsen and Thune (2020) emphasised that hybridity in the research organisations is a very multi-layered and complex phenomenon: 'it not only entails a public-private dimension but also highlights a number of other dimensions of hybridity including knowledge, intellectual property rights and ownership, and norms and practices in research and development activities' (p. 117). Pekkola et al. (2021, 2022) developed a model of 'nested hybridity' in Nordic higher education that considered the hybridity at the micro (positions, roles and identities), meso (organisation) and macro (system and policy) levels. Their model demonstrated in theory how the hybridity observed at higher organisational levels has implications for the lower levels, thereby illustrating how hybrid policies and funding for universities lead to the emergence of a hybrid positions for academic staff and a corresponding hybrid roles and identities.

Universities are professional organisations with a global academic network and strong cross-national disciplinary values and traditions, as well as national administrative idiosyncrasies; they do not therefore represent a typical modern organisation (Musselin, 2021). Thus, universities operate according to the logics of professional group and the values of the academic disciplines, which are distinct from the private and public spheres. Disciplines are distinguished by

distinctive cultures, ways of working and practices and values (Becher, 1989). Universities are organised by disciplines into faculties, although multidisciplinary units have also become common since global challenges, referred as “wicked problems”, such as those related to climate change, require multidisciplinary collaboration to be solved (Ramaley, 2014).

Nevertheless, the coexistence of diverse logics within the context of higher education has already been subjected to theoretical scrutiny. In his 1983 work, Burton Clark presented a triangle of coordination model which identified three sources of coordination in higher education: the state, the market and the academic oligarchy (which can be interpreted as close to the academic profession). Although the analytical model is more concerned with the authority of actors than with logics, in practice these are integrated because these authorities introduce their own logics and values. Consequently, these three sources of coordination create a triangle that represents the hybrid logics applied in higher education and the interaction between them; private, public and academic profession.

In addition, Slaughter and Leslie’s book (1997) on academic capitalism addressed the tensions between the constantly strengthening market logic and the professional logic in universities in the context of the US. They described how academics have become like ‘state-subsidized entrepreneurs’ who operate in a market-like environment. Similarly, Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) suggested the idea of a ‘triple helix’ in which new forms of close collaboration between universities, industries and governments support new kinds of innovation that leads to societal change. Hybridity in universities has also a base on greater demand on societal impact that is supported by cross-disciplinary collaboration (Geschwind et al., 2019).

In conclusion, in universities, a variety of logics concurrently exist, and the power struggles between them are a recognised phenomenon. The distinction between the university as an institution and as an organisation (Välilmaa, 2022) is pertinent to this discussion because the former is associated with disciplinary and professional logics, while the latter is linked to managerial logics. Furthermore, this distinction underscores the inherent tension between the relatively stable ‘core’ and the evolving organisational structure. However, even the disciplinary core is subject to natural evolution as science and the group as a profession continue to evolve.

It is also important to consider the rationale for hybridity of the public sector and universities, which has been linked to increasing the efficiency of public organisations (Gulbrandsen & Thune, 2020). Central trends in the implementation of efficiency and the convergence of universities with the

private sector are managerialism and New Public Management (NPM) (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Evetts, 2009; Siekkinen et al., 2020). As organisations (including universities) converge across sectors, this may lead to more invisible sectoral boundaries (Siekkinen et al., 2022), which may also lead to more hybrid logics and values within organisations, also universities.

In the research on professions, organisational (or managerial) and professional logics and values have been divided as opposing by Evetts, (e.g., 2009) and the idea of hybridity was later developed by Noordegraaf (2015, 2019) and especially within the academic profession by Bruckman and Carvalho (2020), Pekkola et al. (2018) and Siekkinen et al. (2019). Evetts (2009) argued that professionalism changed when it became influenced by NPM: occupational professionalism evolved into organisational professionalism. Occupational professionalism is manifested in the discourse constructed within professional groups and is characterised, for example, by relationships based on trust, collegial authority and control that are operationalised by the practitioners themselves. However, the newer form of organisational professionalism is manifested within the discourse of control, which is mainly used by the managers of organisations. It involves standardised work processes and practices, rational-legal forms of authority, hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making and performance reviews and accountability (Evetts, 2009).

However, hybridism has been used to overcome the notion of professionalism and managerialism as opposing dimensions or different institutional logics (Carvalho, 2014; Noordegraaf, 2015) by proposing that they can co-exist. Noordegraaf (2015, p. 2) described how hybrid professionalism, which includes organisational and professional aspects, can be intertwined in everyday practices. In Noordegraaf's (2015) model, the process begins with two conflicting dimensions (profession and organisation) that lead to hybridity as they merge. Rather than highlighting tensions, hybridity aims to overcome contradictions: 'hybrid professionalism emerges when professional and managerial principles come together – principles that concern (1) how work is coordinated, (2) how authority is established and (3) what values are at stake' (pp. 2–3). In Noordegraaf's (2011, 2015) model, managerial principles are eventually internalised in professional work, and managerial practices become part of the everyday work practices of professionals. In the last phase of this model, professionalism goes beyond hybridity and leads to well-managed professional work (Noordegraaf, 2011, 2015).

Furthermore, the study by Brückmann and Carvalho (2018) concluded that there is a hybridity in higher education that consists of collegial and managerial

characteristics. However, between these characteristics they recognised an efficient collegial archetype that includes characteristics from both sides and supports, for example, 'efficient collective decision-making, where the sense of belonging and participation is still dear to organisational actors, by accepting stronger leadership' (Brückmann & Carvalho, 2018 p. 644). Specifically, this model describes hybridity in the everyday work practices of academic professionals, including increased efficiency and greater control over their work. Those academics who also hold managerial positions are more likely to have applied organisational and managerial values and logics in their activities and professional identities (Pekkola et al., 2018).

2.2 *Changing Universities and the Changing Roles and Identities of Academic Middle Managers*

The influence of international public management and neoliberal trends, including managerialism and new public management (NPM) – which have affected the internal governance structures and power dynamics within universities and emphasised managerial logics as in other public organisations – have led to significant changes in the roles of academic staff and the academic profession as a whole (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Evetts, 2009; Pekkola et al., 2018; Siekkinen et al., 2019). Managerialism has been described as an 'ism' – an idealism that includes the idea that organisations can solve their problems through management (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Klikauer 2015). NPM spread from the United Kingdom (UK) to Europe in the late 1980s, thereby introducing the idea that efficiency in public-sector organisations, including universities, can be improved through more structured and standardised organisational practices (Evetts, 2009; Ferlie et al., 2008).

Finnish universities have been impacted by NPM and managerialism in multiple ways. Many academics have opposed managerial developments that have reduced the power of collegial actors; university collegiums and faculty boards, and structures in universities. A number of deans, for example, are currently appointed rather than elected, and the strategic development of universities is led by the university top management such as rectors and boards, not including academic staff or students (Poutanen et al., 2022; Välimaa, 2012). However, the picture is rather complex. In general, collegial practices may not support equality within the group of academic professionals. They may not recognise power struggles within the professional group, which can lead to the exclusion of some by others (Deem, 2022).

As Finnish universities have institutional autonomy, they have started to develop their HRM and have introduced new career structures, tenure tracks,

which involve more frequent assessment of the work performance of academics. This is also a trend in other European universities (Pekkola & Siekkinen, 2024). This is also related to the managerial shift in universities, as academic work, research and teaching are now more under the control of university managers (Kallio et al., 2015; Pekkola & Siekkinen, 2024). As a result, academic and professional power may be reduced and managerial power increased in universities.

However, it has also been studied that the peer review system used in recruitment and performance evaluations simultaneously empowers both groups – academics and managers in different ways, as professors tend to be heavily involved in these processes, thus exercising academic and disciplinary power over managerial one (Musselin, 2013). In general, academics are critical of any form of control (Deem, 2004; Evetts, 2011), and academic freedom makes academics, especially professors, a difficult group to manage because they have both – disciplinary as well as organisational power in their organisations (Evetts, 2011; Carvalho & Diogo, 2017; Pekkola et al., 2022).

As the number of academic managers in universities has grown and their power has increased, research on academic managers has also increased. In particular, manager-academics, i.e. professors with a managerial position (Deem, 2004), have been identified as a distinct group that differs from professors without a managerial position by the mixed values they represent; that is, they combine professional and managerial logics and values in their work (Pekkola et al., 2018; Deem & Brehony, 2005). Moreover, the position of the academic manager has also become a separate career, such that these managers do not pursue returning to a purely academic career (Musselin, 2021). This role is possible in Finnish universities, although it is not common.

These managers who have entered universities from outside of academia and lack an academic focus might have a different understanding regarding academic work and its management, which can lead to tensions in the workplace. For example, when evaluating the performance of academic work done by academic staff, managers need to be aware of its specificities, such as the fact that the outcomes of academic work are very diverse; including teaching, research, societal impact, administration, project management, and leadership. The outcomes are also very difficult to define, and most of the outputs are not measurable, at least not in a quantifiable way (Musselin, 2007). This is a challenge, for example, in the assessment of activities with a societal impact, which are also strongly influenced by disciplinary specificities.

Academic identity is related to the work roles of academics and the understanding of what it means to be an academic (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2015). In general, identity is not stable; it is constructed and reconstructed in social interaction within the context of collectives and relationships (Giddens, 1991). Identity is also constructed in relation to others; individuals and groups can mirror themselves in relation to others, thereby creating classifications of 'us' and 'them'. This dynamic strengthens the identities of individuals or groups, but it can also create stronger divisions between them (Bauman, 2004). The gap between managers and academics in universities is a good example of this. Managers, including academic managers, are seen as a separate group with no understanding of academic realities. Furthermore, academic managers and other managers may generalise that academic staff do not understand organisational realities such as budgets.

However, roles and identities can also be hybrid and mix many logics and values (Pekkola et al., 2021). Carvalho and Santiago (2010) found that many deans have a strong academic identity despite their managerial role and the strong organisational focus they apply to their work. In their study, they demonstrated that deans perceived themselves first as academics and then managers, i.e. they had a stronger professional than managerial identity. They also felt that it was essential to retain their academic research and teaching roles, without which they felt they would be 'just managers'.

In addition, the new entrepreneurial activities of universities, which include increasing cross-sectoral and non-academic collaborations and the constant search for external funding, make the role of middle managers increasingly complex because they are expected to know both worlds. These entrepreneurial activities have transformed academia into a more entrepreneurial space where research can be commercialised. Slaughter and Leslie recognised this in the United States (US) context some 30 years ago when they conceptualised it as 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). In this vein, Lam (2015) studied academics who have entrepreneurial roles in universities and created typologies of academics with traditional and entrepreneurial orientations. In her study, most of the academics fell into the 'entrepreneurial hybrid' category. That is, the academics believed in the importance of collaboration between academia and business, but they also recognised the need to maintain a boundary between the two. While they had hybrid roles, a strong academic identity remained.

For middle managers, the different expectations of top managers and academics can cause stress. Because of the difficult decisions they make, they are sometimes perceived and labelled as 'bad guys'. To cope with these tensions and conflicts, academic middle managers may play a role in which they

prioritise management tasks over their moral concerns. They may also perceive themselves as pragmatic role-players (Brown et al., 2019).

2.3 *The Finnish Context – Changes in Universities and University Management in Finland*

Changes in management structures in Finnish higher education have been analysed in several papers (e.g., Pekkola & Kivistö, 2019; Pinheiro et al., 2019; Välimaa, 2022). Furthermore, the role of professors with management positions (Pekkola et al., 2018) and the new hybrid roles of academic managers (Pekkola et al., 2020) have been discussed, as has role hybridity in Nordic countries (Pekkola et al., 2021, 2022). Based on this previous research, changes in Finnish universities and their management can be traced back to the early 1990s. The 1990s saw major changes in the management structures of Finnish public administration in response to global changes and trends towards building more performance-oriented and efficient administration.

In Finland, universities have been at the forefront of implementing the ideology of performance-based management, and management of Finnish universities has developed into one of the most performance-oriented public systems in the world (Kivistö & Kohtamäki, 2016). This performance-oriented policy has also had an impact on the top management of Finnish universities. The changes have been gradual, culminating in two major legislative reforms in 1997 and 2009. The 1997 reform created a single legislation for all universities, and the 2010 reform separated universities from the state's personnel and budget structure and made them independent legal entities.

In parallel with the 'structural development' of the Finnish higher education system through legislation and mergers, the role of managers has changed. The major changes in the 2000s can be divided into two different categories: changes before the 2009 legislative reform and changes after the reform. This division has two functions: firstly, it provides a broader perspective on the changes, i.e. they did not happen overnight, and secondly, it highlights the importance of legislation for the management structure even in post-2009 universities.

Already before the legislative reform in the 2009, three important incremental changes were made to university legislation. Firstly, external members were made mandatory on university boards. Secondly, full-time deans (professional managers) were made possible, and universities were given the third mission; societal impact. The appointment of a university rector by its board was also discussed during the legislative change, but the appointment remained in the hands of the collegial body of universities, i.e. collegiums.

The subsequent 2009 legislative reform introduced six important and inter-related changes. Firstly, the legal status of universities was changed from public

authorities to independent legal entities (foundations or public law institutions). Secondly, universities became independent financial entities. Thirdly, the status of university staff was changed from civil servants to employees. Fourthly, the role and composition of university boards was changed towards a more corporate-like structure. Fifthly, the appointment of the rector was changed to be made by the University Board.

Finally, the number of universities was reduced from 20 to 16 (and is currently 14 as of this writing) (Pekkola & Kivistö, 2013; also see detailed governance structure in Pekkola & Kivistö, 2019). In addition, important decisions were made about the areas that would be considered to be under universities' purview. For example, the overall changes meant that universities were allowed to have their own personnel policies, internal structures and management systems.

3 Data and methods

The data that were analysed for this paper consisted of two surveys. The first dataset was collected through an electronic survey of rectors ($n = 10$), vice-rectors ($n = 9$) and deans ($n = 32$) at all Finnish universities in March 2020. However, only the data collected from the 32 deans are referred to in this chapter. The survey was sent to 114 people, of whom 52 responded, for a response rate of 45 %. The proportion of female deans was 39 % ($n = 13$), and the proportion of male deans was 58 % ($n = 19$). The survey was part of a project funded by the Finnish Union of University Professors, the original aim of which was to evaluate the recruitment of professors at Finnish universities. However, it was enriched with questions about crisis leadership when the coronavirus pandemic affected the Finnish Higher Education system.

The other survey data were collected in spring 2024 and were related to the project 'Crises, university management and work: How can universities perform better in crises?' (Perkins et al., 2024). The survey, which was sent to all universities and university of applied sciences, included top managers (rectors and vice-rectors), middle managers (e.g., deans and heads of units), lower-middle managers and heads of subunits (e.g., heads of departments) and 'other managers'. For the purposes of this paper, only the data from the middle managers at universities are included, i.e. deans ($n = 21$) and heads of units ($n = 16$).

The open question that was used in this study was, 'Considering your current position as a manager, what kind of tensions and challenges exist for you in your work (related to, for example, your different roles at the organisation, personnel management, conflicting demands of higher-ups and staff you

lead)?' A total of 35 middle managers working in Finnish universities provided answers. Some offered very short answers to the question, while others wrote longer reflections.

Deans in Finnish universities work as heads of faculties, and it is very common that they hold a professor position at the same time. Heads of units have management positions at the departmental level, and they also hold senior academic positions, such as professor or possibly lecturer or senior researcher. People are selected in these positions by a rector (deans) and by deans (heads of units).

The quantitative survey data was analysed using descriptive methods (in the IBM SPSS), since survey data were rather limited in terms of the number of respondents. The qualitative survey data was analysed using thinking with a theory (Hiesh & Shannon, 2005), where the researcher is familiar with the theoretical considerations as they reflect the data with them while forming themes emerging from the data.

4 Findings

4.1 *The Survey Conducted in 2020*

In the survey, the deans were asked to rank on a scale from 1 to 5 for whom they felt they were most responsible, 1 being 'least responsible' and 5 being 'most responsible'. The groups for whom they were asked to rank their level of responsibility were academic staff, upper management, the scientific community, students or external partners (Figure 12.1).

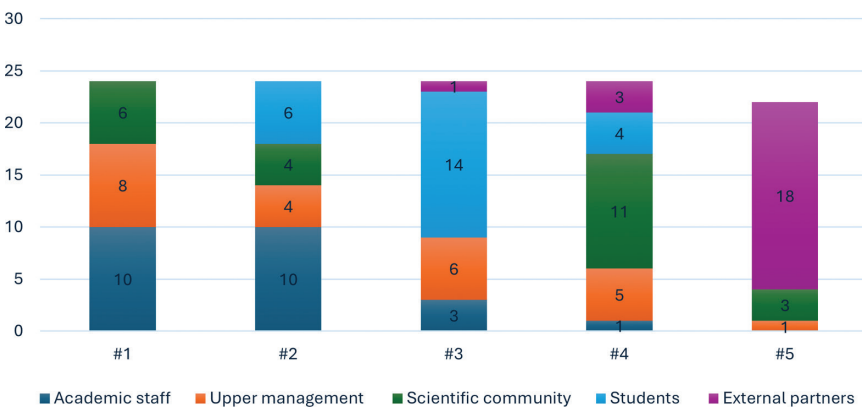


FIGURE 12.1 Responses to the survey question: "As an academic manager, I am responsible for ..." (put in order from 1 to 5)

Figure 12.1 shows the deans' ranking from 1 to 5 who they felt was their management responsibility. The responses illustrate the challenges in the work of middle managers that we have described in previous chapters: how to balance between the needs of academic staff, top management, the scientific community (i.e., the disciplinary community), students and external partners. Figure 12.1 show that academic staff and top management received almost equal numbers of votes for first ranking, with the scientific community also well represented. Academic staff and students were ranked second. Students received the most votes in third place, in fourth place was the scientific community, while the external partners were ranked in fifth place.

These results aligned well with the theoretical discussion presented previously about the orientations of middle managers in general. That is, even though they have hybrid roles and identities, most of them perceive having an academic core, with professional values and logics.

4.2 *The Survey Conducted in 2024*

In the open-ended responses to this survey, the deans and heads of departments described some of the tensions and challenges they experienced in their work. Initially, they often found themselves balancing the expectations and needs of top management and the academic staff. Sometimes middle managers saw certain changes, especially those related to budget and organisation, as inevitable, especially those that had been discussed with top management, but other academic staff did not share the same perspective as illustrated with open answers below:

Particularly in times of austerity pressures, there are naturally tensions ... It can be difficult for an individual employee to see the big picture and thus understand management's decisions.

The usual conflicts between hopes and reality. Management wants change, employees want continuity and peace of mind.

As a dean you are stuck between the top management and academia, a bit like the patty in a hamburger.

The responses also reflected frustrations with bureaucratic structures, organisational inefficiencies and policies imposed by universities' central administration that did not seem to reflect the realities at the departmental or faculty level. In addition, the staff relied on these middle managers to shield them from confusing policies, which added to the pressure on the role.

In universities, electronic systems are subject to constant evolution, thereby requiring a considerable investment of time also from managerial staff. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the evaluation of university research and teaching activities by both universities themselves and by external actors. This has had a significant impact on the time-consuming nature of the analysis and reporting activities of managers. The constant pursuit of efficiency may paradoxically result in inefficiency.

Routine tasks take up a lot of your time. There is not enough time for daily monitoring.

Another challenge is that new guidelines and electronic systems keep coming from central administration that don't seem to make sense, but I, as a manager, should encourage staff to follow and use them.

Middle managers must also navigate the challenge of staff members who resist new policies or changes, especially when these seem bureaucratic or unnecessary from their perspective. This resistance often stems from the university's culture and history of 'frozen conflicts'. However, this resistance also demonstrated the tensions between professional and managerial values and perspectives.

Another level of tension is history. At the university, problem cases are often just buried, and frozen conflicts exist at multiple levels. People who think critically wanting to keep their own heads is of course the root cause. So, university people are very conservative, and no changes are likely to come.

Many middle managers reported that dwindling resources in higher education have led to increased competition for funding and other essential resources, which creates a tense working atmosphere. While the managers had to sometimes take the side of the organisation and impose strict budget guidelines, the academics found it difficult to understand the priorities and choices of the management.

All the tensions and challenges I experience at work are related to the scarce and dwindling resources in higher education and research, the need for savings and the struggle for resources between teams. These challenges and tensions also lead to a deteriorating working atmosphere.

There is a lot of wrangling over resources and their fair distribution. That's what it's always like.

Routine tasks and increasing administrative work took up a lot of time, leaving little room for strategic leadership. As a result, a lack of time on the part of middle management can lead to a backlog of work that slows down work at the unit level as middle managers have to prioritise between work tasks.

[With the] [l]ack of time for senior management to deal with issues, bottlenecks exist, and it negatively affects the way they carry out their own work and communicate with their own unit.

The perceptions of the various tensions reported by the deans and department heads captured the complex dynamics they faced in their middle-management roles in universities. Because middle managers often see themselves as academics and peers of their academic staff, these tensions can be mentally taxing when solutions are not easy and conflicts arise between top management and academic staff – with middle managers caught in the middle. This dynamic is bound to be stressful and to cause identity stress for the middle managers. Funding issues, in particular, are difficult because their resolution sometimes means reducing staff numbers or restricting the ability of academics to work and travel.

Supporting academic staff in times of austerity may require creative solutions. Middle managers are often motivated to do what is best for everyone in every situation, and this can create stress for them when trying to resolve issues. However, change is sometimes inevitable and may be beyond the control of middle managers. For academics, changes to organisational structures and new technologies aimed at increasing efficiency can take a lot of time and effort to implement, and may be experienced negatively, causing inefficiency. Therefore, from a managerial point of view, academics can appear resistant to change.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, we examined the tensions and challenges in the roles of middle management, particularly in the context of Finnish universities in light of the managerial transition (Pekkola et al., 2018; Poutanen et al., 2022; Välimaa, 2012). We analysed data from two surveys. The first survey related to deans' and department heads' perceptions of who they felt responsible for within the university. Respondents ranked their perceived responsibility as follows: first to academic staff, second to senior management, third to students, fourth to

the scientific community, and fifth to external partners. This finding was in line with the findings from Lam (2015) and Carvalho and Santiago (2010) on the orientation of managers; both studies found that the orientation was primarily academic.

In their open-ended responses to the second survey, deans and heads of departments described tensions and challenges between management and academics that placed them in the middle, trying to meet the needs of all parties in their operational work. Kekäle (2003) described the role of academic leaders/managers as ‘thermostats’ because they are constantly solving problems and negotiating between academic staff and top management. Competition for resources creates most of the tensions as universities struggle with decreasing public funding and the increasing costs of infrastructure and staff. New expectations and work tasks for middle managers increase the burden; reporting and evaluations in universities takes a lot of time. Brown et al. (2019) conducted a study investigating the coping mechanisms adopted by middle managers when faced with these pressures. The study revealed that the participants rationalised their decisions in order to distance themselves from challenging circumstances. This was not the focus of this study, but it would be an interesting topic for further research.

As universities are responsive to the expectations of society to have more impact (Geschwind et al., 2020) and be more cost-effective (Bleiklie et al., 2017), university governance and management have been changing accordingly (Musselin, 2021). In addition, as the performance of universities is constantly being evaluated and connected with their funding (Kivistö & Vellamo, 2023), managers have pressures to emphasise the outputs of their units. Therefore, the performance of the academic staff has been increasingly monitored (Pekkola & Siekkinen, 2024) which has increased the workload of middle managers. As well as identifying and responding to societal and global trends affecting universities, a middle manager’s priority is supporting academic professionals in their core university functions: research, teaching and societal impact.

Consequently, as in hybrid universities where different logics and values prevail, hybridity is visible and concrete in academic management work (Pekkola et al., 2021). In spite of the academic “core”, the ideas of efficiency and managerialism have been integrated in the minds of many academics (Brückmann & Carvalho, 2019), especially for academic managers (Pekkola et al., 2018).

These findings support the similar findings from Portugal of middle managers as academic professionals whose roots are also deep in academic grounding

(Santiago & Carvalho, 2010). Because they are positioned on both sides – as academic professionals and as organisational managers – they have to play by both sets of rules and in both roles (Pekkola et al., 2018). In some cases, these values may be well aligned; in others, they may be in conflict. The question of how to resolve such conflicts and reduce tensions in academic management is a pertinent one, and it is one that requires further research. In order to ascertain a response to this query, further research is required into the manner in which academics can be ‘managed well’ (Noordegraaf, 2015). Although people at universities often share the same objectives, it is not uncommon for them to have different views and approaches.

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The Hybrid Values in Universities of Applied Sciences

Board Members' Perspectives

Marjukka Mikkonen, Elias Pekkola, Luiz Alonso de Andrade and Jan-Erik Johanson

Abstract

This study explores the hybridity within Nordic higher education (HE), focusing on Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). Recent governmental reforms, driven by new public management and governance paradigms, have introduced competing values and principles, adding layers of complexity to the HE landscape. Employing a mixed-method approach, this research utilizes quantitative and qualitative survey data from board members of Finnish UAS, supplemented by publicly available organizational and policy documents. We show how hybridity manifests at different levels of the nested systems of UAS. The findings contribute to the growing body of work on hybridity in HE by offering a novel analytical framework to further studies on hybridity in higher education institutions, specifically in UAS. Furthermore, we show how board members navigate and reflect competing values in UAS governance. This study also enriches the literature on university boards by incorporating the concept of hybridity, offering a theoretical framework to understand the complex dynamics of board governance in HE.

Keywords

hybridity – higher education – universities of applied sciences – board governance

1 Introduction

Multifaceted and sometimes even competing external demands, such as those for societal relevance, effectiveness, and accountability, have shaped the role of the Nordic higher education (HE) system towards complexity

and hybridity (Pekkola et al., 2022). Furthermore, governmental reforms inspired by the paradigms of new public management (NPM) and later new public governance have introduced new, competing values and principles alongside the former ones (Ejersbo et al., 2023). Hybridity in HE research has recently started to spark academic interest. For instance, Pekkola and colleagues have explored hybridity, particularly nested hybridity, in Nordic universities (Pekkola et al., 2020, 2022). Additionally, Bruckmann and Carvalho (2018) examined hybridity through collegial and managerial archetypes occurring in systems and structures as well as interpretive schemes, while Siekkinen et al. (2020) explored the hybridity of the academic profession through changes and continuities in the profession. Winter and Bolde (2020) illustrated how hybridity creates challenges for HE leadership and managers in supporting academic work in universities. However, these studies tend to focus on public “comprehensive” universities, leaving a gap in the literature on higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding universities of applied sciences (UAS).

For international readers, the case of Finnish UAS is interesting as it provides an example of a HEI operating as a limited company within a Nordic welfare setting and public funding framework. A hybridized operating environment and emerging hybrid structures and practices in Nordic HE are evident. One example of this hybridization is the metamorphosis of mostly municipality-operated vocational post-secondary institutes first into regional polytechnics and then into nationally funded UAS. The reform has not only upgraded the educational level of vocational institutes and merged them into larger units but also reformed organizational and decision-making structures. The 2014 legislative change transformed the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences into limited liability companies. From this pupal case, a new mongrel was born.

Already the act defining the legal entity of the universities of applied sciences is hybrid by nature. The act defines UAS as Limited Liability Companies that are:

- Statutory parts of the national higher education system
- Constituents of their students and staff
- Non-profit organizations
- State-authorized agencies
- Tuition-free education providers (with the exception of non-EU/EEA students)
- Mostly state-funded
- Employees have criminal liability for acts in office

Thus, UAS are companies authorized by government decision, whose customers do not pay for their services and are part of their constitutive members, whose employees have the legal liabilities of civil servants, whose main funding comes from the government, and whose shareholders do not have the right to benefit from their ownership. Therefore, UAS are an innate selection for the study of hybridity. The boards of UAS are particularly interesting because the role of the rector has transformed from board chair into that of a CEO, assuming responsibility for the board's oversight and direction. Moreover, while board governance in HEIS has received growing interest over the past decades (e.g., Antonowicz & Jones, 2023; De Boer et al., 2010; Donina et al., 2015; Kretek et al., 2013; Mikkonen et al., 2025), the studies often consider comprehensive universities, not UAS. The aim of this paper is to explore and illustrate the hybridity occurring at different levels of UAS. Particularly, we are interested in the board members' perspectives on the interplay of competing values between the LLC organization archetype, traditionally geared to create profits for its stakeholders, and HE institutions, heavily publicly funded and aimed at creating public value for the common good.

To achieve this aim, we employ a mixed-method case study approach (Yin, 2017). The data consist of both quantitative and qualitative survey responses collected from board members in Finnish UAS. The survey data set is complemented with publicly available organizational and policy documents.

This study contributes to the growing body of work on hybridity in HE by assessing how board members reflect the competing values in UAS board governance and how these competing values appear in the actions of board members. Furthermore, we enrich the literature on university boards by incorporating the concept of hybridity into the body of work, demonstrating it as a functional theoretical starting point in explaining the complex phenomena of board governance in HE and pointing to the possibilities of navigating the complex accountability environment.

2 Networked Hybridity in Universities of Applied Sciences

Hybridity can be defined as a multidimensional concept occurring at different levels of social practices (Pekkola et al., 2020). In organizational research, it often refers to a mix of varied, contradictory values and practices emerging from public and private sector characteristics (Pekkola et al., 2022). The most notable difference between the two sectors can be summarized

as follows: while the public sector (i.e., state) aims to cater to the public interest and public good by offering public services (often) through public organizations for all citizens, the private sector (i.e., market) leans more on individualism and for-profit operations by providing commercial goods and services to paying customers through private organizations (Karré, 2020).

Hybridity may manifest in some or many of the following features in public organizations: (a) mixed ownership, (b) goal incongruence and competing institutional logics, (c) multiple funding arrangements, and (d) diversity of financial and social control through a combination of public and private means (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2018). Some forms of control might include joint regulation between government and industry or a mixture of professional self-control determination combined with managerial imperatives (Noordegraaf, 2015).

In the aggregate, hybrid arrangements are open to two types of critique. On the one hand, they can be judged to present hollow politics, in which important decisions are made within company boardrooms rather than in democratic forums. On the other hand, they can be evaluated as lousy business for not being fully committed to the principle of profit maximization (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2018). Within HE, these aspects may complicate measurement, create problems in finding suitable metrics for evaluation, and lead to difficulties in building accountability and legitimacy (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020). Moreover, in the context of HEIs, especially UAS, this mixture of public and private values is further complicated by academic and social values and interests, creating an even more complex operating environment.

UAS are a prime example of hybrid organizations as they exhibit hybridity at several levels and through the aforementioned four characteristics (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2018). First, they exhibit mixed ownership. Often, different municipalities are the main owners, but in many UAS, owners also include other organizations, such as universities, foundations, and other entities. Second, they show goal incongruence and competing institutional values (logics) by nature. On the one hand, they are limited liability companies, and thus by nature steered by market values, while on the other hand, their aim is to contribute to public value for all citizens, provide knowledge and education that cater to regional needs, and promote the generation of social value within local communities. Moreover, UAS are increasingly involved in research activities. For example, many UAS have established research positions and research tracks, increasingly influenced by academic values. Third, UAS have multiple funding sources. They are heavily publicly funded; however, besides public funding, their funding pool includes streams such as private organizations,

grants, tuition fees, and investment activities. Fourth, they are under different forms of control. While they are publicly regulated and monitored through steering and scrutiny by the state (in Finland specifically by the Ministry of Education and Culture), they are also increasingly under pressure from local industry development to cater to the demands for an educated workforce by local businesses. Lastly, one distinctive characteristic of UAS is their important social value in terms of local development, especially in more rural areas. For instance, they provide education and knowledge to cater to local needs and, by providing HE, they keep younger generations living in these areas, providing another value set impacting UAS.

3 Public, Private and Academic Values in Higher Education Institutions

As discussed above, HE institutions, including UAS, are hybrid by nature. Already in 1983, Clark introduced three values (or principles) shaping universities: academic oligarchy, the market, and the state. UAS are not traditional comprehensive universities, and their faculty does not form an academic oligarchy in the same sense as in comprehensive research universities. However, Clark's triangle, based on nuanced analyses of different steering forces of universities, can be used as a simplified heuristic in the case of UAS to illustrate the competing values emerging from market (monetary), public (policy), and academic (professional) values.

The rise of neoliberalism, academic capitalism, market competition, and NPM-inspired reforms has led to the marketization of HEIs, a trend that has accelerated also in the Nordic countries (Pekkola et al., 2020; Pekkola & Kivistö, 2016). Market value in the context of HEIs often refers to market/private sector principles of HEIs manifesting in performance-based budgeting, discourses of research excellence, as well as competitions and rankings, in which research and education are seen as products and universities as businesses (Marginson, 2011).

Public value in the context of HE often refers to widespread, normative ideas of human development, democratization, and collective interests of society (Marginson, 2011). Consequently, there is a moral element in the notion of public value as it implies showing probity in front of multiple audiences (Moore, 2013). For instance, HE should be "open, egalitarian and accountable to the larger community beyond HE" (Marginson, 2011, p. 418). Often, governments and public organizations are perceived to operate on behalf of the community and to represent the interests of the public (even if they may also have their own

interests or other conflicting goals to promote) (Pekkola et al., 2020). The challenge is how to create mechanisms and means that ensure representation of the community and empower local communities. If HEIs are seen solely as private benefit producers, their distinctive role in serving broader social and public purposes might disappear. However, competing values, such as marketization and NPM-inspired ideals, threaten the collective, public purposes of HEIs.

Another set of values traditionally driving the HE sector are the traditional academic values, such as academic freedom, collegiality, and professional autonomy. These academic values are based on the ideal of a university as a collegial nest of knowledge, discussions, partnerships, and academic self-governance (Marginson, 2011). Due to economic, social, and technological changes, these traditional values are pressured in the contemporary HEI context, causing tensions between them and the need to adapt for instance to the market-driven demands. Even if the centrality of academic values may have decreased in recent decades due to the rise of academic capitalism and marketization, professional work and scientific (peer) evaluation remain central in many managerial reforms, evaluations, and funding decisions (Pekkola et al., 2020).

4 Analytical Framework

Based on the above theoretical sections, we have drafted an analytical framework to guide this study (Figure 13.1). The framework illustrates the micro, meso, and macro levels of hybridity in UAS, driven by the three previously identified values (public, private, academic; Clark, 1980), in addition to a fourth value (social value) illustrating the local role of UAS as defined already in the law. These values manifest at all levels.

The analytical framework leans on the idea of networked hybridity (Pekkola et al., 2020) in understanding the Finnish UAS systems as hybrid systems with different levels of hybridity and interlinkages between macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. The levels are not necessarily nested, meaning that each level would automatically have implications for the other levels. Rather, the levels are interconnected and complex, sometimes exhibiting nestedness and overlapping, while at other times the connections may be one-directional or occur through a network connection instead of direct interconnectedness from one level to another (Pekkola et al., 2020, 2022). In this sense, the levels do not possess independent existence. Instead, they offer a zooming device to focus attention on different scales of social existence (Ylikoski, 2014). In networked

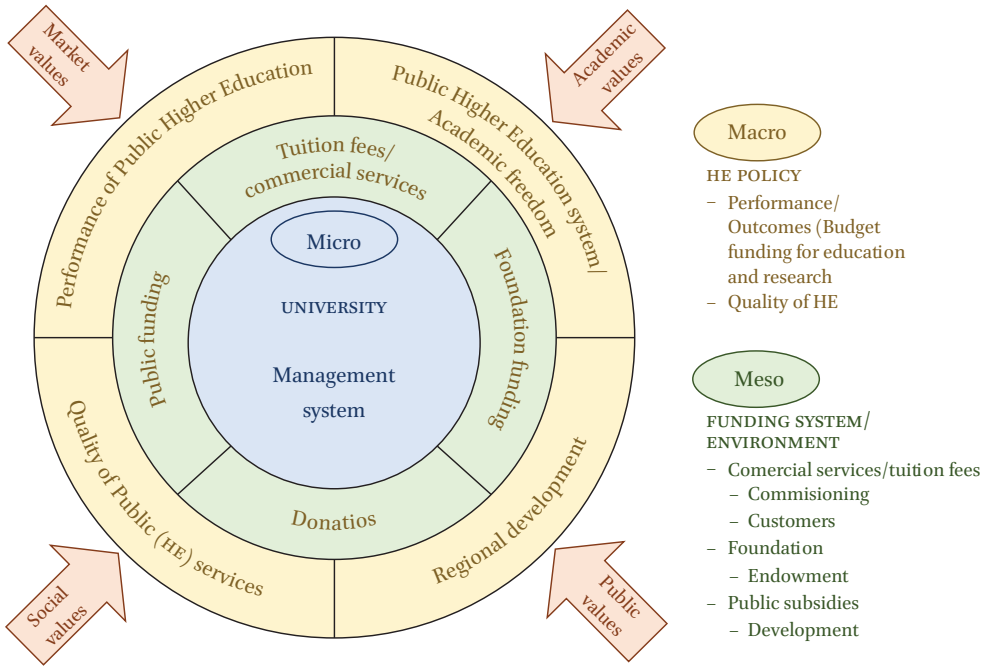


FIGURE 13.1 Levels of hybridity in organizing public higher education services through limited liability company with multiple funding streams (Adapted and modified from Johanson et al., 2023)

hybrid systems, such as UAS, the overarching values may also take different forms and relations at different levels of the system and are defined and operationalised through the actors on that level (Pekkola et al., 2020).

At the macro level, hybridity is clearly visible in HE policies, which, on the one hand, lean on performance/outcome-based budgeting, echoing the tenets of managerialism and underlying market values. At the same time, HE policies underscore the local role of UAS in fostering innovation and knowledge production in smaller cities and rural areas located further away from university cities, and providing work-life-oriented education. In terms of hybridity, this level embeds the ideology of market values (performance-based budgeting) while also promoting public values, such as the provision of HE for all citizens, decentralizing HE from larger cities. Academic values at the macro level may manifest through different forms of academic freedom, such as the extent to which HE boards provide freedom and tools for lecturers and researchers to exhibit their profession.

At the meso level, UAS show hybridity especially in terms of funding. The funding system is directly connected to the macro level and policy aims because UAS are heavily publicly funded. However, at the same time, they may also use private funding sources, such as donations, tuition fees, and commercial services, or even third-sector funding, such as foundation funding. Through business-like operations, UAS can offer their services to local partners and engage in (partly) privately funded research, innovation, and development projects with local companies. Furthermore, tuition fees (for international students) and paid study programs provide another means for for-profit activity.

Finally, at the micro level, hybridity may manifest through the university management system. The other system levels can naturally impact the micro level and how the management system functions. For instance, is the management system based on traditional academic collegial bottom-up decision-making or on a more managerial, top-down decision-making process based on performance measures. Furthermore, as a mediating factor from the meso level to the micro level, different kinds of funding schemes may also impact the management system of the institutions, for instance in terms of whose interests the decision-making serves.

5 Research Setting: Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland

There are 35 HEIs in Finland representing three types of institutions: universities, university foundations, and UAS. 24 of the 35 HEIs are UAS. UAS can provide first and second cycle education (universities and university foundations are responsible for doctoral education), and they base their education, research, and innovation activities on responding to working-life needs (Mikkonen et al., in press).

UAS (previously polytechnics) were established in 1990. The juridical status of universities of applied sciences (UAS) was established in the 1995 Act on Polytechnic Studies and later refined in the Polytechnic Act of 2003. The board is the highest decision-making body in UAS. Under earlier legislation, the rector of a UAS also served as the chair of the internal board, which oversaw academic decisions and internal administration. However, from the outset, it was permissible to include external members on the boards of polytechnics/UAS. Additionally, UAS institutions maintained an external board, often referred to as a “board of trustees,” which represented the owners’ interests. This board was responsible for approving the economic plan and

budget, appointing the rector, and safeguarding the owners' interests. Following the legislative reform of 2014, UAS institutions transitioned to operate as limited liability companies. Consequently, the rector now serves as the CEO, responsible for management and daily operations, while the board is chaired by an external member (Kohtamäki, 2009). Today, UAS boards must have one student and one internal member, respectively, out of 7 or 9 board members.

6 Data and Methods

The data consists of the Finnish survey subsample of a comparative study on university boards and councils across five European countries (Finland, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Sweden; Antonowicz et al., 2025; Mikkonen et al., 2025). Answers were collected with an online tool (Qualtrics) between June 8, 2023, and October 16, 2023. The survey targeted board members of all public universities and universities of applied sciences in Finland. However, in this particular paper, we focus on the responses of the board members in Finnish UAS (number of UAS = 22, number of board members = 193). The questionnaire was sent to the chairs and secretaries of boards (the last reminder was also sent to the registry office) and asked to be transferred to the members of their boards, including a kind request to notify if they had received the message and transferred it forward. After three reminders, 15 of the 22 UAS had notified that they received the survey and forwarded it. The total number of board members in these 15 institutions is 133, of which 44 responded to the survey (33% response rate). The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed items, and we used qualitative and quantitative analysis to illustrate the hybrid nature of UAS. The survey data set was also complemented (when needed) with publicly available organizational and policy documents.

Quantitative analysis was undertaken with statistical software assistance (SPSS 28), mainly through means and frequencies comparison. The open-ended answers were analyzed with reflexive thematic analysis. We used the existing body of knowledge (see analytical framework section) to guide our analysis process, but in the coding process, we included both open and closed coding. During the process, we first familiarized ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the textual inputs. Then, we engaged in coding by marking all the passages relevant to our research aim. Lastly, we generated preliminary themes and engaged in critical discussions to review and refine the themes. Through

these analytical discussions, we ended up with the final versions of the themes as described in this manuscript.

7 Results

In the survey, the respondents answered two sets of 5-point Likert scale questions concerning their perceptions about (1) which issues should be under the control of university boards (Table 13.1) and (2) to whom they think the university board is responsible (Table 13.2). Each of the questions implied different macro-level forces and values shaping university governance identified in the analytical framework: public value, social value (local community), market value, and academic value. Table 13.3 condenses the item responses according to these underlying values, producing a single representative mean for each one of them.

As Tables 13.1 and 13.2 show, responses were rather scattered between the different values bounding HEIs and to whom the HEI board is accountable. In both question sets, agreement rates in every case are higher than 50%, with most items scoring more than 75%. This broad scope of agreement statements in board members' answers highlights the hybrid nature of the values driving decision-making in UAS and UAS boards.

Table 13.3 further elaborates the findings shown in the above two tables, illustrating how all different underlying values (public, social, market, and

TABLE 13.1 Responses according to different university-bounding steering forces for academic priorities and activities UAS ($n = 44$)

Answer	PV 1. National policy priorities	SV 2. Regional development agendas	PV 3. UN SDGs	MV 4. Competitiveness and university rankings	MV 5. Maximisation of external funding	MV 6. Employability of students	AV 7. Freedom for lecturers and researchers
Agree	52.3%	81.8%	77.3%	68.2%	68.2%	100.0%	75.0%
Neutral	22.7%	6.8%	20.5%	15.9%	25.0%	0.0%	9.1%
Disagree	25.0%	11.4%	2.3%	15.9%	6.8%	0.0%	15.9%

PV = public value, SV = social value, MV = market value; AV = academic value.

TABLE 13.2 Responses according to accountability structures for the UAS board (n = 44)

Answer	PV 1. Government/ public authorities	PV 2. Society at large	AV 3. University staff	- 4. Students	SV 5. Local community	MV 6. Business/ economy	AV 7. Academic/ Scientific community
Agree	75.0%	86.4%	88.6%	86.4%	65.9%	77.3%	56.8%
Neutral	11.4%	6.8%	9.1%	11.4%	29.5%	20.5%	36.4%
Disagree	13.6%	6.8%	2.3%	2.3%	4.5%	2.3%	6.8%

PV = public value, SV = social value, MV = market value; AV = academic value.

TABLE 13.3 Mean differences across different underlying macro-level values and standard deviations (n = 44)

Level	Values	Value scores	Std. deviation
Macro	Public value	7.74	1.20
	Social value	7.73	1.40
	Business value	8.08	1.01
	Academic value	7.82	1.30

academic) are seen as almost equally important perspectives driving UAS. However, the aggregated measures in Table 13.3 also reveal small standard deviations from the mean scores, suggesting that the hybridity within boards in terms of diversity of board members’ perspectives is rather low. This is especially the case in business value measurements (std. dev. = 1.01).

The qualitative answers further illustrate the hybrid tensions for UAS. At the macro level, we explored the state and policy level perspectives of the board members. As a case example, the respondents were asked whether the UAS should have specific, coordinated national-level roles/profiles, who should assign these roles, and how they should be assigned. The respondents’ answers were rather mixed, underscoring, again, the hybridity of the UAS at the macro level. Accordingly, some respondents underscored the role of local businesses as the ones assigning the roles:

Yes, and that [the roles] should be dictated by the needs of the business in the country, not regional politics.

[I]t would be easy to distribute roles and responsibilities according to the needs of the business and on the basis of already available expertise and the internal expertise/resources of the higher education institution.

While for others, these roles should be assigned by national authorities and state government representatives, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) or the state government:

Shouldn't it be established in a coordinated manner by OKM and combine resources, expertise and at the same time spread the risks?

It would probably be up to the parliament to decide if regional profiling of higher education institutions is to be started. [It is] strongly involved in regional politics.

Yes, the ministry should determine.

A third aspect highlighting the nature of UAS as strong local players is the emphasis on local actors deciding on specialization and the role of local needs:

I think it is good that the HEIs look like their region. A large number of students come from the area and stay there.

Lastly, the fourth aspect emerging from the data is the role of universities in this kind of decision-making. Nevertheless, the market value narrative as well as the narrative of social value were visible:

Universities' own profiling is important.

Yes, the board of the HEI decides depending on the area's development potential and business activities. If there is fierce competition for substance with another HEI, deep cooperation should be considered.

While many respondents promoted the role of one single actor in terms of macro-level decision-making, many highlighted the role of multiple actors:

Maybe. OKM [the Ministry of Education and Culture], OPH [National Agency for Education] and higher education rector's councils should have a role.

It would be easy to distribute roles and responsibilities according to the needs of the business world and on the basis of already found expertise and the internal expertise/resources of the HEI.

The Ministry of Education and Culture and HEIs collaboratively.

Yes, there should, based on the national/regional educational needs.

The profiling work should be made by universities themselves, but the ministry should demand clear profiles when making the funding contracts with HEIs.

At the meso level, the focus was on the different funding sources of UAS. As Table 13.4 shows, state funding is the largest share of UAS annual funding, representing the significance of public influence through funding and funding steering. The second largest funding source is grants, which include targeted state grants and project funding from the EU and other entities, such as Business Finland and the Research Council of Finland, EU funding, project-specific funding from other funders, grants from municipalities, and the share of the Ministry of Finance of state funding for teacher training schools. However, it is considerably smaller compared to state funding (896 MEUR > 190 MEUR in 2023). Other funding sources include business activities, representing

TABLE 13.4 Funding sources of UAS (Vipunen, 2024)

Year	Turnover	State funding	Grants	Business activities	Other income	Fundraising activities, net income	Investment activities, net income
2018	967,5 M	777,9 M	116,6 M	49,5 M	23,6 M	17,4 M	-1,1 M
2019	989,2 M	777,1 M	135,7 M	51,5 M	24,9 M	0,3 M	19,0 M
2020	1,039,0 M	819,7 M	136,7 M	51,2 M	31,4 M	-4,989	9,7 M
2021	1,093,9 M	855,9 M	147,8 M	49,8 M	40,5 M	0,8 M	32,9 M
2022	1,126,0 M	848,8 M	170,2 M	56,9 M	50,1 M	0,7 M	-35,5 M
2023	1,214,9 M	896,1 M	190,3 M	62,1 M	66,4 M	1,0 M	36,5 M
Total	6,430,8 M	4,975,4 M	897,3 M	321,0 M	237,0 M	20,2 M	61,5 M

the turnover accumulated from business related to actual operations, such as continuing education and consultancy and research services, and investment activities. These two funding sources represent the underlying market values of UAS. Lastly, fundraising activities create a small share of the UAS annual budget. Fundraising activities may be seen to represent social value as often these donations and testimonials come from the locals.

The heavy influence of the state created through substantial public funding was also present in the open-ended questions. When the respondents were asked to describe the relationship between the board and the Ministry of Education and Culture, some respondents brought up the steering/funding perspective:

Shallow. The relationship is mostly expressed in finances; some degrees pay the university more, and thus are of interest. I don't think I've heard more from our chair.

The role of the board members is smaller [than that of the chair], but significant when forming the board's common line in responding to the ministry's goals and in other directions that guide operations.

Fighting for ever-dwindling funds, trying to maintain an education system/policy that does not work in its current scope with decreasing funding at all.

The relationship is good. Constant competition of funding takes time away from other activities.

Involved in the performance negotiations.

At the micro level, the study considered the management system. The respondents were asked to rate their perception of the dominant decision-making model in their HEI, whether it aligns more with the collegial ideal (1) or managerial (9). As Figure 13.2 shows, the results suggest overall hybrid decision making-processes with a score of 5.73, although leaning towards a managerial style. While none of the respondents thought the decision-making process is fully collegial, the majority of the respondents thought the process is mixed, with a greater number of respondents rating five and above. Notably, nine respondents thought that the decision-making process is fully managerial, highlighting the inclination towards market values.

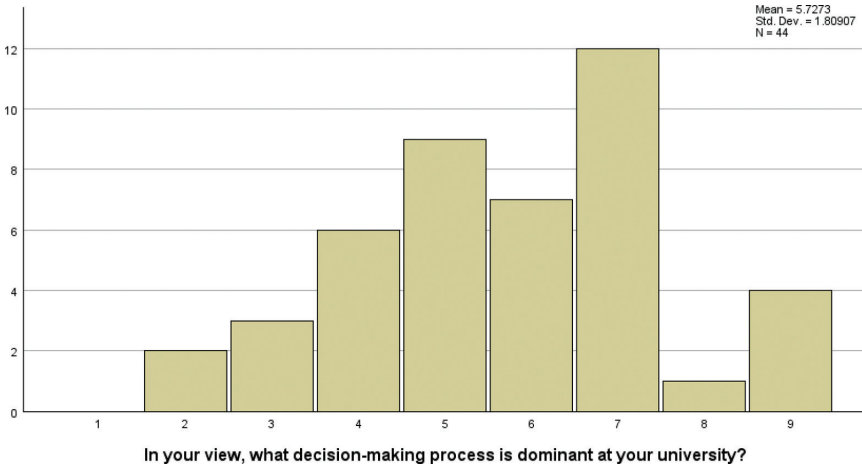


FIGURE 13.2 Frequency distribution of board member perceptions on their HEI's decision-making process, where 1 is fully collegial and 9 fully managerial

Furthermore, the qualitative responses shed light on this conclusion. On the micro level, the survey respondents were asked to describe their HEIs' management system and practices and compare them to other organizations in which they had worked before. On the one hand, the managerial mindset and market values behind decision-making were strong. The respondents recognized the managerialist/business-like management system and described it as "Management systems are typical to a well-run business of this size" and "business-like, result-oriented, strategic, flexible." These highlight the leaning towards market value underlying the institutional decision-making. Also highlighting the market values was the top-to-bottom type of management identified by the respondents:

Very authoritarian [the management system], in itself no different from a public or private company. Decisions are made at the top without listening to experts, which is really weird considering that it (the UAS) is an expert organization.

Very top-to-bottom managerial system, which seems to be a weird choice in an institution full of high achievers.

However, the more traditional logic was also visible in the respondents' answers. One respondent highlighted how educational institutions tend to have a different kind of management model compared to other types of organisations:

Naturally different because of [being] educational organization.

Furthermore, academic freedom was also noted in the replies, highlighting the more academic logic behind the institution's management system:

Academic freedom is wider and stricter processes will only come through information system reforms.

8 Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to explore and illustrate the hybridity occurring at different levels of UAS. We examined the phenomenon through UAS board members' perspectives on public, market, academic, and social values shaping hybridity at micro, meso, and macro levels. This study has three main contributions to the literature on hybridity (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2018; Karré, 2020) and hybridity in HEIs (Pekkola et al., 2020, 2022; Winter & Bolde, 2020).

First, we provided an analytical framework that enables the exploration of hybridity in HEIs, particularly in UAS. The framework highlights the three interlinked levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro) and the interplay of different values manifesting at each level. We were mainly interested in the four key perspectives on values in HEIs. The first, driven by neoliberalism, academic capitalism, and market competition, reflects the global marketization of HEIs, including in Nordic countries (Pekkola et al., 2020; Pekkola & Kivistö, 2016). The second focuses on public value, emphasizing human development, democratization, and societal interests, incorporating a moral element of integrity (Marginson, 2011; Moore, 2013). The third is rooted in traditional academic values such as freedom, collegiality, and autonomy, envisioning universities as self-governing spaces of knowledge (Marginson, 2011). In addition to the three traditionally cited values in HE studies, we have also included a fourth value, social value, in the framework to highlight the special role UAS have in local development compared to traditional universities.

Second, we show how UAS exhibit hybridity at all three interconnected levels. According to the findings, there are value tensions in the board members' responses between managerialism and academic self-determination at the micro level. While the survey results (Figure 13.2) suggested a mixed management system leaning towards managerialism, the qualitative answers revealed variations between individual board members' perspectives. The alignment with the managerial mindset present in UAS decision-making somewhat differs

from the traditional model for HEIs, which promotes collegial decision-making and autonomy of the researchers and teachers (see Pekkola et al., 2020).

At the meso level, the findings indicate a strong reliance on public funding, which naturally stresses the impact of public values and the steering power of the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, when considering the entire palette of funding sources, all four underlying values are strongly present. Market values manifest in competitive funding (part of grants), business activities, and investment activities, while the social value characterizing particularly UAS is embedded in fundraising activities. Considering the contemporary trend of public HE funding, which increasingly bases on performance (see e.g., Kivistö & Kohtamäki, 2016), it may be expected that public funding is partly seen to advocate for market values.

At the macro level, the findings revealed mixed aspirations between top-down national control and regional independence. Within the value regimes composed of public value, market value, social value, and academic value, the UAS board members showed equal emphasis on public value and social value, stronger orientation to market value, and weaker commitment to academic values. Based on the current body of knowledge (see e.g., Pekkola et al., 2020, 2022), these values seem to, again, differ from traditional comprehensive universities, in which academic values seem to have higher importance, and market values are more criticized, especially from the internal board members' perspective.

Third, we show how hybridity manifests in two forms in the UAS boards. First, it manifests through the competing values the boards prioritize. Based on the quantitative analysis, the board members' collective perspectives highlighted all four values measured, underscoring hybridity at the board level. Furthermore, the standard deviation was rather small, indicating consensus among the board members. However, the respondents also showed differing nuances in their answers. While some tended to advocate for market values, others highlighted more academic or public values or a combination of these. As the standard deviation was rather low in the macro-level quantitative answers, this may mean that individual board members exhibit hybridity by underscoring multiple values. An interesting path for future studies would be to explore whether there are differences between the value hierarchies of different board members based on their background (e.g., internal vs. external board members). Moreover, when considering the distribution of answers at the meso level (Figure 13.2), we can see that, even if a mixed system is largely embraced, the scores of individual board members are rather scattered, illustrating divergence in the constitution of boards. This suggests that hybridity emerges within the board as a result of combining the perspectives of different board members.

While the focus of this chapter has been on UAS, we encourage further discussion and comparison between different types of HEIs, both nationally (e.g., between traditional universities and UAS) and internationally. Comparative approaches may reveal nuanced specialties in UAS compared to other types of HEIs. This article has focused on the board members' perspectives, which are indeed crucial. However, for a more comprehensive understanding of hybridity, the perspectives of other actors are also needed. Therefore, we call for more research on multi-stakeholder perspectives, including faculty members and students, for a more pronounced understanding of the phenomenon. Lastly, we encourage further research to test the suggested analytical framework in other country contexts to define and extend the factors at play on different levels of HE systems and how the identified competing values interact with these factors.

To conclude this chapter on hybridity in UAS, we will discuss UAS and hybridity on a general level and offer two dilemmas for future discussions.

The Nordic HE system has evolved toward complexity and hybridity due to external pressures such as societal relevance and accountability (Pekkola et al., 2022). Government reforms inspired by NPM and New Public Governance have introduced competing values and principles (Ejersbo et al., 2023). Hybridity in HE has drawn academic interest, with research exploring its impact on universities' structures and academic professions (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018; Siekkinen et al., 2020; Winter & Bolde, 2020). However, most studies focus on comprehensive universities, leaving a gap regarding UAS.

Finnish UAS are organizationally an interesting combination of public and private institutions (Karré, 2020) since they operate as limited companies but are non-profit, have public duties, funding, and mission. The hybridity is mirrored at different levels of the HE system, namely UAS as organizations through the management system, their organizational environment through the funding system, and policy context (see Figure 13.1). Hybridity in the public sector is characterized by several features, including mixed ownership, goal incongruence, and competing institutional logics and values. Additionally, it involves multiple funding arrangements and a blend of financial and social control through both public and private mechanisms (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2018).

The ability to combine various value creation regimes within UAS puts them in a mediating position between central and local governments on the one hand and between public and private value generation on the other hand. In network governance, the intermediary position connecting various walks of life provides a relational advantage for information control and speed of information retrieval (Burt, 1995). Thus, the proximity to both governments and markets enables the detection of weak signals quickly from various sources, which can be used for adaptation. In financing, multiple sources for resource

acquisition provide possibilities to balance fluctuations in single revenue sources. In the long term, these may help UAS adapt to external changes more easily, thereby ensuring their long-term survival. By detecting signals from both public and private sectors, UAS can continuously align and adjust their strategies with evolving needs and demands, thereby securing their relevance and impact in the future.

The intermediary position in between comes with caveats. UAS, as hybrid organizations, are faced with multiple demands from their stakeholders, which may require mutually exclusive actions and replace complacent institutional consensus with destructive multiple accountabilities disorder (Koppell, 2005). Such disorder includes compromising behavior in many directions. At worst, it might be that compromising results in making concessions to a multitude of stakeholders, which pleases none of the involved partners. A seemingly rational consequence of the disorder could be more detailed performance measurement to clarify accountability, but it might only lead to an additional reporting burden without resolving the underlying controversies.

In another sense, UAS show multiple aspects of worth, in other words, things that we hold dear in our lives (Stark, 2011). It is not straightforward to combine and justify civic virtues of equality, trustworthiness, and authority with short-term market actions based on price and competition. As these aspects of worth reside in the same organisation within UAS, the justification of contrary registers of worth becomes difficult and is open to grievances. However, it is not the case that UAS are only torn between multiple lovers. Instead, they have some options in selecting their accountability structures. This caters to the long-term sustainability and survival of the UAS. Changing political constellations within government offer options to cater to more permissive demands, and government cycles are short enough not likely to produce serious adverse developments. As UAS produce a whole menu of different values, they have the option to strategically highlight and put forward the value in which they excel and downplay those forms of values they wish to hide. Furthermore, the existence of multiple institutional values at play and alternative decision-making heuristics gives hybrid organizations an excuse to select the most favorable decision-making forums to justify their decision-making procedures in a positive light.

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Balancing with Academic Perspectives in Knowledge Brokering – Arranging the Hybridity of Knowledge Brokering Organisations

Tommi Kärkkäinen and Reetta Muhonen

Abstract

With governments paying increasing attention to universities' societal impact and the potential of academic research to support policymaking, the role of knowledge brokering organisations in contemporary knowledge systems emerges as particularly intriguing. Previous studies have illustrated them as intermediaries that use varied practices to connect research and policy. This chapter addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on these organisations' internal structures, values, and activities, drawing from interviews of a Finnish and a Norwegian knowledge brokering organisation. The study conceptualises knowledge brokering organisations as hybrids. It looks to understand how academic research – e.g., academic knowledge, values, and practices – is part of this organisational hybridity. The chapter increases understanding of the organisational side of knowledge brokering and how these organisations engage with academic research in constructing their versions of good knowledge brokering. The results highlight two distinct ways to arrange hybridity in knowledge brokering organisations, showing that the bricolage of state, market, managerial, and professional logics differs between the two organisations. In a *hierarchising arrangement*, one logic is set above others, and in the studied organisation, this was manifested so that the aim of supporting science-policy interaction had to adapt to principles, practices, and symbols of the academic world. In contrast, the *differentiating-and-combining arrangement*, describing the other case organisation, showcases how logics are mixed and matched and kept in productive tension. This was manifested so that academic knowledge is shaped and steered rather than simply followed as knowledge brokering professional logic alongside market and managerial logics guide the organisation's operations.

Keywords

knowledge brokering – hybrid organisations – academic research – evidence-based policymaking – institutional logics

1 Introduction

Traditionally, universities have been dedicated to producing and sharing scientific knowledge, adhering to principles of academic freedom and the scholarly community's shared values. Driven by core values of openness, impartiality, and critical inquiry, universities strive to maintain objectivity and uphold scientific principles. (Newman, 1982.) However, in today's complex environment, universities are also expected to deliver economic impact and societal benefits, which introduces new institutional logics into universities that emphasise market-driven approaches and public governance principles (e.g., Jongbloed, 2015; Hammershøj, 2019; Pekkola et al., 2022). This combination of logics creates hybrid structures within universities, where academic freedom, market orientation, and public accountability intersect, generating both tensions and opportunities.

With the increasing complexity of the academic and societal landscape, *knowledge brokering organisations* (KBOs) such as research institutes, think tanks and science academies (Cooper 2014; Gluckman, Bardsley, & Kaiser, 2021; MacKillop & Downe, 2023) have emerged as pivotal players in the national knowledge systems (e.g., Kowalczywska & Behagel, 2019; White, 2019; Caduff et al., 2023; MacKillop & Downe, 2023). Drawing from the idea of enhancing the systematic utilisation of research in policy work, the evidence-based policymaking agenda (Head, 2015; French, 2019; MacKillop & Downe, 2023), KBOs aim to support interaction between researchers and policymakers through various activities, such as organising dialogue events, building capacities and supplying research for policymakers through reports (Turnhout et al., 2013; Davies, Powell, & Nutley, 2015; Wyborn et al., 2018). While such knowledge brokering activities are nothing new *per se* (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981; Freeman, 2007; Gluckman, Bardsley, & Kaiser, 2021), Lentsch and Weingart (2011) note that governments have created booming markets for organisations that support science-policy interaction by emphasising knowledge as a resource for policymaking and cutting from in-house expertise and research funds within public administration.

As actors that aim to connect groups with different organisational backgrounds, KBOs have been viewed as intermediaries which also serve universities by connecting research to its stakeholders (Cooper, 2014; Langley et al., 2019; Saarela, 2019). In this way, KBOs relate to the policies and ideas around universities' societal relevance. They create and strengthen pathways for the societal impact of academic research (cf. Locke, 2009; Knight & Lightowler, 2010; Saarela, 2019). Additionally, KBOs bring a fundamentally flexible contribution to the development of hybrid structures between universities and society.

Previous studies on knowledge brokering have focused primarily on analysing brokering on individual and practice levels, while relatively little is known of the ways organisational arrangements of brokering are produced, maintained and developed, and how the arrangements affect the practice of knowledge brokering (Cooper, 2014; MacKillop, Quarmy & Downe, 2020). Gustafsson and Lindskog (2018) note that there is a danger of science-policy organisations becoming black-boxes of which activities in mediating between researchers and policymakers are understood but which organisational characteristics and processes remain in the dark. Relatedly, much of the existing literature focuses especially on the interplay between scientific and policy-related considerations, leaving other factors in organisational arrangements more to the sidelines (cf. Lentsch & Weingart, 2011; Gustafsson & Lindskog, 2018; De Doná & Linke, 2023).

This study addresses the gap in current research, shedding light on how KBOS' approach to and conditions for knowledge brokering are shaped by the way they are organised internally. To do this, the study conceptualises KBOS as hybrid organisations that include different sets of organising principles, practices, and symbols, in short, institutional logics. The objective of the study is to provide insights into how academic research is part of this organisational hybridity. Through this, we aim to better understand how organisations arrange their hybridity, and the place of academic research in it, in striving for their conceptions of good knowledge brokering. The data of the study is drawn from interviews with knowledge brokers working in two KBOS representing a Nordic context, specifically Finland and Norway.

The study complements knowledge brokering literature by answering calls for more theoretical and organisational understanding of knowledge brokering (Gustafsson & Lindskog, 2018; MacKillop, Quarmy, & Downe, 2020). Additionally, it makes a novel contribution to the hybridity literature by shedding light on the constitution of KBOS' hybridity and the way they manage it to support their aims of connecting research and policy (cf. Murray, 2010; Mair, Mayer, & Lutz, 2015). Through this, the study explores how academic perspectives fare in these hybrid settings, how they are taken into account, shaped and, woven into the organisations' operations.

This chapter adopts the following structure. Section 2 reviews studies that provide insights into KBOS from the perspectives of science-policy interaction and hybrid organisations. In Section 3, we outline the analytical framework based on institutional logics and strategies for managing them. Section 4 introduces the KBOS under study and characterises the interview method and interviewees. In Section 5, we proceed to the analysis of the organisations, highlighting the specific findings for each. Finally, Section 6 provides an

overview of the key findings and discusses them in the context of knowledge brokering literature.

2 Knowledge Brokering Organisations and Hybridity

MacKillop et al. (2023) view that KBOS can be distinguished from other organisations with three factors: (a) their primary aims include supporting the utilisation of research in policymaking, (b) they establish, use and develop practices to communicate and support the communication of research to policymaking, and (c) they have close relationships with government. Well-known examples of KBOS include Sax Institute in Australia, which focuses on health-related issues (Campbell et al., 2011), and the What Works Centres in the UK, which cover multiple policy areas (MacKillop et al., 2023).

KBOS have also been found to share the ongoing pursuit of proving their credibility in mobilising research and relevance in addressing policy issues (Zhang et al., 2022; MacKillop & Downe, 2023). This is because they are typically new actors and need to constantly balance the standards of the two stakeholder groups. Lentsch and Weingart (2011) describe that science-policy organisations apply similar professional standards in such work, deviating from purely academic considerations. They aim to make the knowledge both politically robust – acceptability and feasibility of applying the communicated knowledge – and epistemically robust – exactness and validity of the communicated knowledge. Balancing these two can be viewed to constitute general principles for approaching quality in science-policy organisations.

Beyond research and policy considerations, Åm (2013) demonstrates that KBOS consider their market position within the larger field of science-policy organisations. In taking other organisations and policy demands into account, they work in flexible ways, interpreting suitable activities and approaches to be viewed as useful and relevant by their stakeholders. KBOS have also been found to draw from think tank or corporate ideas, such as change theories and mission statements, in making their work legitimate (MacKillop & Downe, 2023).

While KBOS share these characteristics, they organise their operations in various ways. KBOS can be public, private, or non-profit entities, which influences their relationships with other actors – such as customers, collaboration partners, and stakeholders – as well as their objectives in facilitating science-policy interaction, whether it is for private profit or the public good (Cooper, 2014). KBOS have also organised their operations around various professional competencies and perspectives. De Doná (2021) compared two international science-policy organisations, analysing how they employed hybrid

management strategies to create and deconstruct science-policy hybrids, delineate boundaries between science and policy, and coordinate their interactions. The study found that one organisation, with a mix of science and policy members, used all strategies more fluidly, while the other, composed solely of researchers, was more cautious and aligned closely with scientific norms.

At the heart of KBOS' operations are practices for science-policy interaction through which they support evidence-based policymaking or the wider system related to it (activities, structures, and organisations oriented towards the utilisation of research in policymaking). Davies, Powell, and Nutley (2015) identified several approaches to interaction which organisations might adopt: producing and sharing research (product push), organising events for exchange of expertise (intermediation), promoting research application (implementation support), enhancing policymakers' skills (capacity building), sharing best practices (developing the field), and fostering cooperation with diverse stakeholders (networks). Similarly, Wyborn et al. (2018) found variations in practices – whether they are supply, demand, or co-production (collaborative knowledge production) oriented – and pointed out that the choice of practices is linked to the organisations' assumptions about the most effective interaction strategies for influencing policymaking. Studies have viewed these varying approaches to knowledge brokering to also lead to trade-offs in science-policy interaction between clarity and complexity, speed and accuracy, and supply and demand (Sarkki et al., 2014; De Doná & Linke, 2023).

The above studies illustrate KBOS as a versatile set of organisations that have a wide range of ideas and practices regarding good knowledge brokering. These include, for instance, views on what is effective and desirable in informing policy and how to build organisational legitimacy and credibility. The studies also portray the relevance of the idea of hybridity to understand both knowledge brokering as practices that connect research knowledge with policy needs and as organisational arrangements that draw from various sectors and stakeholder considerations in designing and carrying out operations. Furthermore, looking at KBOS from the perspective of hybrid organisation literature, they can fall under different categories of hybridity based on their intersection with societal sectors (Secinaro et al., 2019). Depending on their characteristics, KBOS can be public-private hybrids, such as research institutes and think tanks (Gulbrandsen, 2011; Cooper, 2014; See also Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017) or public-NGO hybrids such as science academies (Lentsch, 2010).

Studies on hybrid organisations have found institutional logics as central to hybridity (Mair, Mayer & Lutz, 2015). Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) conceptualise institutional logics as organising principles, practices,

and symbols that are part of a particular institutional order. General broad logics such as family, state, market, and profession can be viewed to characterise institutional orders at a societal level. Organisations such as KBOs manifest institutional logics in their own ways since it is necessary or beneficial for organisations to engage with them, for instance, to seem legitimate and credible in the eyes of relevant others and to operate and act in line with their aims (Greenwood et al., 2011; cf. Åm, 2013; MacKillop & Downe, 2023). Institutional logics are like reference points to interpret and take up ways to act upon, associate with and understand social life and its particular circumstances (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Societal logics and their part and relevance in social contexts such as communities or organisations are (re)produced by the actors in these contexts, individuals (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Greenwood et al., 2011; Besharov & Smith, 2014). Individuals learn the role and significance of logics in contexts and act according to them; logics “steer” individuals. On the other hand, the way the logics are part of contexts also depends on agency, meaning that individuals also influence logics and their instantiation.

For instance, internalising the professional logic of academic research can make academic ideas, norms, standards and activities more understandable for an actor. They also help in drawing boundaries between the academic profession and other professions while perhaps also making it challenging to accept the role of other logics, such as markets, as factors that steer the strategy of a university. Acting according to the professional logic of academic research makes the actor’s contributions more convincing to the community of academic researchers. In doing so, the actor also contributes to the reproduction of that logic, as its elements are internalised as part of their cognitive and practical repertoire. At the same time, how the logic is enacted depends on the actor’s interpretation of it. Academic research and its associated values are performed through the ways the actor behaves in social situations, such as research projects, departmental meetings or beyond university context.

Hybrid organisation literature has studied institutional logics in a variety of contexts, from higher education and public administration to healthcare organisations and social enterprises (cf. Reay & Hinings, 2009; Christensen & Lægveid, 2011; Pache & Santos, 2013; Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2021; Pekkola et al., 2022). Since hybridity often includes logics that can be competing or in other ways in tension with each other, studies have analysed the ways organisations manage with the plurality of logics.

Murray (2010) points out that the existence of multiple logics in organisations can lead to four outcomes. *Logics collapse*, meaning that one logic is used to take over some other logic(s); *logics co-exist*, meaning that logics are kept separate

but present; *logics are blended*, meaning that new logic arises from selectively combining elements of two or more logics; *logics are differentiated*, meaning that different logics are kept in tensions with each other and their relationships negotiated in each situation. Besharov and Smith (2014) argue that logics can be arranged to have hierarchical relationships. This does not have to mean collapse, easy co-existence or situational differentiation. In an organisation, this can mean that one logic, such as market, has primacy over others, and in conflict or negotiation situations, the resolution lies on the primary logic, for instance, prioritising revenue and competitiveness. Mair, Meyer and Lutz (2015) find that conforming hybrids are organisations that identify with one particular logic and assume hybrid practices for symbolic reasons, such as expanding their legitimacy. Dissenting hybrids do not clearly identify with one logic but rather defy identification to a logic (existing in between logics), selectively couple elements from logics (operationalising features of one logic in particular governance arrangements and then another logic with other arrangements) or innovate by reaching beyond the logics (drawing inspiration from other logics and operationalising them).

In the case of KBOS, we see hybridity as a relevant perspective to better understand, also beyond research and policy considerations, the many sources of organising principles, practices and symbols that KBOS draw upon (Lentsch & Weingart, 2011; Åm, 2013; MacKillop & Downe, 2023). It also guides in understanding how KBOS manage with their different logics and the role that academic research gets to play in these arrangements.

3 Analytical Framework

KBOS operationalise divergent practices, deal with multiple stakeholders, and orient their work according to situational goals. To understand this hybridity of KBOS and the role of academic research in it, we developed an analytical framework based on institutional logics. By drawing from previous literature, we demarcated four logics relevant to KBOS: *state logic*, *market logic*, *managerial logic*, and *professional logic*. Institutional logics refer to the organising principles, practices, and symbols that structure different institutional orders (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Following the literature, we viewed institutional logics as composed of elements which we categorised as sources of legitimacy, values, aims, activities and control principles (cf. Pache & Santos, 2013; Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2021) (See Table 14.1).

The institutional logics framework enables us to explore the logics' manifestation and relationships within KBOS. It helps us with our objective to

understand KBOS' hybridity, especially from the perspective of academic research. We have outlined the characteristics that reflect the logics guiding the KBOS' operations (Table 14.1).

State logic serves as a crucial source of legitimacy, emphasising contributions to societal progress. While following state logic, KBOS operate according to the idea, and related values, that their work should further the public good. The primary aim of this logic is to produce outputs and services that support the welfare of society, with practices reflecting a commitment to the public good. In terms of control principles, state logic dictates that democratically elected leaders determine the activities and standards of the organisation. (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; MacKillop & Downe, 2023).

Market logic is grounded in the actor's position within relevant contexts of resource competition and trade. While adhering to market logic, KBOS highlight the importance of competitiveness and maintaining a good reputation in markets. This logic aims to secure the continuity of operations while increasing capital and market share, with activities reflecting the needs and standards of stakeholders or customers. Under this logic, market competition influences operational decisions. (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; Åm, 2013; MacKillop & Downe, 2023).

Managerial logic focuses on the hierarchical structure as a source of legitimacy. While following managerial logic, KBOS prioritise efficiency and predictability in their operations, aiming to enhance and secure the efficiency of activities and organisational structures. Practices guided by this logic reflect the ideas of managers regarding resource and time efficiency. Hierarchical order and considerations of efficiency are fundamental principles that shape activities and standards. (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; Kislov, Hodgson, & Boaden, 2016; Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2021).

Finally, *professional logic* is anchored in the expertise of professionals. While embracing professional logic, KBOS value professional quality and peer recognition in their work. This logic aims to produce high-quality activities while supporting the professional development of staff. Practices under professional logic reflect the expertise, collaboration, and standards upheld by professionals, with the culture and network of professionals shaping activities and standards (Knight & Lightowler, 2010; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; Turnhout et al., 2013).

These general logics manifest in specific forms depending on the context. This means that depending, for instance, on the profession or market in question, the specific elements of the logics vary (e.g., which professionals quality standards are followed or what the competition is about in the markets).

TABLE 14.1 Characteristics of institutional logics relevant in the context of knowledge brokering organisations (applied based on Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; Pache & Santos, 2013; cf. Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2021)

	State logic	Market logic	Managerial logic	Professional logic
Sources of legitimacy	Contributions to societal progress	Market position	Hierarchy within organisation	Expertise of professionals in the organisation
Values	Public good is furthered by the organisation	Competitiveness and good reputation for organisation in markets	Efficiency and predictability in organisation	Professional quality and peer recognition in organisation's work
Aims	Producing outputs and services to support public good	Securing continuity of organisation and increasing organisation's capital and market share	Increasing and securing the efficiency of activities and structures of organisation	Producing high-quality activities and supporting professional development in organisation
Activities	Organisation's practices reflect idea of public good	Organisation's practices reflect needs and standards of stakeholders or customers	Organisation's practices reflect managers' ideas of resource and time efficiency	Organisation's practices reflect expertise, collaboration and standards of professionals
Control principles	Democratically elected leaders determine organisation's activities and standards	Market competition determines organisation's activities and standards	Hierarchical order and efficiency considerations determine organisation's activities and standards	Culture and network of professionals determines organisation's activities and standards

4 Data and Methodology

The article addresses the knowledge brokering activities of a Finnish and a Norwegian organisation. Both are non-profit organisations aiming to support research and its advancement nationally. This is achieved through activities such as granting awards and memberships to researchers based on scientific merits, organising discussion events and publishing scientific works. Importantly, advancing communication of research beyond academia, especially through supporting evidence-based policymaking, is a central activity for the organisations. Both organisations started to develop this knowledge brokering activity during the latter half of the 2010s.

The organisations consist of a leadership, management and member level. The leadership level is formed by a board of leading figures, such as the president and vice-president, who are generally professors. The leaders are responsible for the organisation's activities and for carrying out the decisions of the board. The management is distributed between different areas of responsibility such as finances, communications and project management. Memberships in the organisations are based on nomination and election, with the candidate's research merits as the main criteria for selection. Membership is an acknowledgement of scientific contributions and does not come with any organisational responsibilities.

While similar in many ways, the organisations arrange their knowledge brokering differently. The Norwegian organisation began to invest increasingly in knowledge brokering when its leading figures viewed it important that the organisation expand its science-society activities. The organisation has arranged knowledge brokering around a committee, which consists of researchers that have been invited and selected based on their scientific merits and experiences of communicating with publics beyond academia. The researchers serve four years as committee members, after which new members are selected. The committee carries out the majority of the knowledge brokering, while occasionally, other employees can make research-based statements on topical issues. The committee's work is supported by a management-level knowledge broker and the committee leader. The organisation's knowledge brokering happens mainly through either translating reports of international science advice organisations to the national context or organising events in which researchers give presentations to policymakers, mainly politicians, after which researchers and policymakers discuss in a panel.

The Finnish organisation's knowledge brokering started with a ministry-funded project, which looked to develop new practices for supporting policymaking with research. Later, when the project finished, its practices and operations were embedded into the organisation's other main activities.

Knowledge brokering is based on a group of professionals that work as a team with different areas of responsibilities – written work or stakeholder interaction-related tasks. A leader is responsible for the team's operations and coordination as well as international relations. Additionally, one knowledge broker, while taking part in the practical work of brokering, is also responsible of strategically planning the work of the team. In addition to the aims of supporting evidence-based policymaking, the organisation looks to develop new practices and tools of knowledge brokering. Brokering happens mainly through different types of reports for which brokers collect, synthesise, summarise and translate knowledge for policymakers and through workshops in which brokers facilitate researchers' and policymakers' discussion about ongoing policy work based on an orienting (policy) document. The majority of knowledge brokering activities start from a ministry contact and related policy needs. The organisation also aims to support researchers' and policymakers' capacity for science-policy interaction through educational materials and arranging events for the exchange of best practices.

The organisations also fund their activities slightly differently. The Norwegian organisation finances its activities through its own capital, foundation grants and research funding organisations. Additionally, the organisation receives important funding from a ministry to support its brokering activities. The Finnish organisation operates with its own financial capital and with a foundation grant that is part of financing the knowledge brokering activities.

We selected these two organisations in particular since they both have integrated knowledge brokering as one of their core activities, and they are neither private companies nor government agencies. Thus, they can decide their approach to knowledge brokering while also having to establish their relevance and legitimacy for their stakeholders. This relative freedom and act of balancing make them interesting as KBOs. We also chose the organisations since they aim to support policymaking without set thematic areas such as environment, health or education that are typical in the field of knowledge brokering (cf. Cooper, 2014; MacKillop, Quarmy, & Downe, 2020). This makes them distinct from many other organisations and, as such, interesting. Also, the lack of thematic or disciplinary restrictions meant that we did not have to focus on understanding theme or discipline-specific viewpoints, findings or approaches in our analysis.

By focusing on these organisations and their differences, we aim to examine how the KBOs arrange their hybridity and consider academic perspectives in their brokering work. We do not, however, aim to compare national approaches to knowledge brokering through these two case organisations. The unifying element for our empirical cases is the Nordic context, providing

an interesting perspective for studying knowledge brokering, as the countries share strong historical and socio-cultural ties that emphasise openness and trust. These shared values support close and more informal connections between researchers and policymakers (Liimatainen, 2023; Muhonen & Tellmann, 2022; Tellmann & Muhonen, 2024), fundamentally enabling knowledge brokering organisations to take an active and flexible role at the interface of science and policy.

The data comprises nine interviews, including four knowledge brokers from the Norwegian organisation and five from the Finnish organisation, conducted in Finnish and English in the spring of 2024. The interviews were semi-structured, approximately 90 minutes long, carried out, recorded and transcribed via Teams. The interview questions addressed the interviewees' background and current tasks in knowledge brokering; information sources in knowledge brokering; different characteristics, background and development of the organisation's knowledge brokering; skills, success, failure, and quality in knowledge brokering; and lessons learnt related to brokering.

As the organisations arranged their brokering activities differently, the brokers' positions varied between the organisations. This also contributed to Norwegian interviewees describing the practical work of knowledge brokering more abstractly than the Finnish interviewees, who portrayed brokering in detail.

In the Norwegian organisation, we interviewed individuals in leadership and management positions. Consequently, we interviewed only the leader from the knowledge brokering committee and excluded other researcher members, as they were primarily affiliated with universities. This decision allowed us to focus on perspectives from those mainly attached to the KBO. Altogether, two interviewees were former leaders who played key roles in establishing the organisation's knowledge brokering activities and participated in practical tasks such as report writing and stakeholder interactions. The other two held management positions: one was the acting committee leader, involved in coordinating and supporting the committee's work and engaging in brokering tasks, while the other was the committee secretary, responsible for organising brokering events, supporting the committee, and translating brokering content onto the organisation's web pages.

In the Finnish case, we interviewed all knowledge brokers in the brokering group. All these interviewees were primarily employed by the organisation. They were not researchers, though two of them had completed doctoral dissertations, and they had varied backgrounds in journalism, science communication, consulting and policy work. Among the interviewees from the Finnish organisation, one broker was responsible for general leadership tasks, while

another was in charge of strategically planning the group's operations and arranging science-policy interaction events. The other three were only responsible for their respective areas of brokering; two dealt with written work and one with interaction-related practices.

Table 14.2 below summarises the position of the interviewees in their organisation.

The study asks the following research questions:

- a. What kind of role does academic research play in the hybridity of knowledge brokering organisations?
- b. How do the arrangements of hybridity affect the organisations' conditions for and approach to knowledge brokering?

After identifying the relevant logics and characterising their ideal types in the context of KBOs, based on prior literature (Table 14.1), we operationalised our research questions into examining how different elements of these logics manifested in the data. This involved analysing interviewees' perceptions regarding the organisations and examining how they can be viewed to correspond with the elements in each logic. Subsequently, we looked at the ways the organisations arranged the relationships of the logics. This meant, with

TABLE 14.2 Position of interviewees in their organisation

Organisation	Level	Task
Norway	Former leader	Organisational leadership, establishment, coordination and practice of brokering
Norway	Former leader	Organisational leadership, practice of brokering
Norway	Management	Contact with researchers and policymakers, arrangement of events, research communication through webpages
Norway	Committee leader	Practice of brokering, facilitation and support of committee work
Finland	Leader	Group leadership, international relations, coordination of brokering
Finland	Group manager	Group strategic planning, practice of brokering (interaction)
Finland	Group member	Practice of brokering, (interaction)
Finland	Group member	Practice of brokering (written work)
Finland	Group member	Practice of brokering (written work)

relevant literature (section 3), making sense of the interviewees' perceptions to understand what kind of legitimacy, values, aims, activities and control are portrayed by the interviewees to be in a central position for the organisations. Finally, we interpreted that this arrangement of logics and the role of the academic world in it represented the organisation's conception of good knowledge brokering and the ways in which it can be enacted.

5 Results

5.1 *Maintaining Proximity to Research – The Norwegian KBO*

5.1.1 Entering a Crowded Field of Science-Policy Interaction – Academic Research as an Asset in the Knowledge Brokering Market

The interviewees depicted the central element of the organisation's knowledge brokering to be its adherence to academic professional logic. The independence and credibility of the organisation's actions were perceived to be gained through following research findings and drawing from researchers' expertise in planning and carrying out brokering. Furthermore, the organisation's leaders, in charge of the operational directions of the whole organisation, and other members were selected based on their scientific merits. Thus, upholding and communicating the status of science was *the* approach to achieving the organisation's goal of informing policymakers and ensuring that research is part of the societal debate – to advance the public good through science.

Finding a fitting position in the field of science-policy organisations was described to pose challenges. When the previous leader of the organisation had held meetings with other science-policy actors, introducing the idea of the organisation's new activities, the response was not overtly positive as the actors suspected that their area of work was being overtaken. Affected by the markets of science-policy organisations – it was described that the leader had to consider how to bring novelty to the field without assuming any other organisation's position:

Interviewee N1

The person that was [position and title of a leader] when I started here, he had an idea that he wanted this [name of the organisation] to be the centre of science advice for policy in Norway that was big thinking, of course, big goals. – And he really did thorough work and organised a lot of meetings with leading organisations, with politicians, with institutions – There's a whole range of institutes, institutions, organisations, all kinds of even companies that play a role within science advice. – So, it's very

fragmented, spread all over, and that means that if you are going to try and take a role, you will step on some toes. Yeah, that's easy to understand. So that's why it was a bit. It's challenging because you want to continue to be friends with all of these organisations.

Such market considerations were part of the reasons why one of the organisation's knowledge brokering practices was to translate international science advice reports aimed for policymakers to national context. This was not done by any other organisation in Norway, and this strategy was described as focusing on low-hanging fruit. Additionally, in finding its place, the organisation's strong academic orientation and pool of well-established researchers were perceived by the interviewees to provide a unique starting point and a competitive edge in supporting policymaking and informing public discussions.

Furthermore, the interviewees perceived organisational autonomy as an advantage in the markets of science-policy organisations, making a strong distinction from other actors who were assumed to operate more with a business-oriented logic. This position, free from the pursuit of financial gain, was seen to make the organisation's work credible in an era characterised by an abundance of information and difficulties in finding trustworthy information sources.

Interviewee N1

– in our view, what makes us perfect to do this work is because we're independent. And that is a key point, nobody owns us, we don't do business. And we're a mix of all kinds of professionals, or what do you call, scientists – And that's something that very few can compete with when giving advice, so we have no, no interest in anything, we just want the best for society and bring the status of science to the table and make it accessible for politicians.

Thus, market logic is very much present in the interviewees' perceptions regarding the organisation. However, the logic is not manifested in any 'pure form' but rather its elements are part of making the organisation relevant as academically oriented KBO in Norway.

5.1.2 Practices and Challenges of Prioritising Academic Research for Good Knowledge Brokering

The strong role of academic knowledge and valuing academic merits in the Norwegian organisation can be partly traced to the fact that the members of the knowledge brokering committee are researchers. These researchers primarily work in their own research organisations, knowledge brokering is an

additional task for them. This was viewed to challenge knowledge brokering. One of the interviewees (below) described how the researchers give greater importance on focusing on accumulating merits in the academic world. Instead of thinking more broadly about which topics would be important for knowledge brokering or using their time to promote collaboration between younger researchers and policymakers, the researchers, according to the interviewee, tend to select their own research topics and projects for promotion in knowledge brokering. We interpreted the interviewee's perceptions as not being a critique of the committee researchers but rather an observation of how market, managerial and professional logics characteristics to academic work infiltrate knowledge brokering and conflict with the professional side of knowledge brokering. Academic researchers were described as doing what is 'rational' for them, meaning that they follow the values and norms of the disciplinary cultures they have been socialised into.

Interviewee N4

My experience is that even experienced researchers are primarily interested in their own research, so I would say the topics we've been doing for the four years are basically initiated by members of the committee promoting their own work – they're busy and occupied with their own, and, of course, in the research community you are evaluated by your research, not by how many or how often you appear in the newspapers, right? And I would say that for the research community, it is maybe a minus to be too much in the newspapers. So, I think researchers are rational. They concentrate on their own things, and they see this [name of the organisation's committee], some of them see this as a possibility of getting things out with the help, with some help from the [name of the organisation].

Interviewees emphasised the dominance of scientific publishing over knowledge brokering in the academic world. We interpreted that this reflected not only managerial efficiency demands and market competition in academia but also deeply ingrained academic values and practices. As articulated by the interviewee, even experienced researchers are primarily focused on their own work, driven by the need to produce publishable results rather than engaging and putting effort into knowledge brokering activities. (cf. Merton, 1973).

Interviewees described academic research as a robust, self-directed system that is difficult to intervene in from the outside. An interviewee had undertaken unsuccessful attempts to shift the focus of the organisation's approach more towards the needs of the 'applied world':

Interviewee N₃

So, in many ways, I have been involved in putting science to use since I was a student. And the work in the [name of the organisation] was not the simplest for that because [name of the organisation] is quite dominated by the academic culture, which does not really involve oneself on an equal footing with the applied world around us. It's quite different in many ways from the traditional academic setting, which I find quite hard to transform, actually. We did that during my four years as [leadership position at the organisation], but it didn't provide a lasting imprint on the [name of the organisation] because this is a quite how do you say, well-embedded tradition of how to think.

In describing how to make knowledge brokering successful, the management and leader level interviewees stressed that both the topics and researchers participating in brokering activities should be chosen carefully to avoid the messages being too scientific or uninteresting for policymakers. They strongly believed that if an attempt is made to intervene in the process after such choices, it can already be too late since arguments based on research prevail over others.

The interviewees emphasised that researchers should be selected based on their ability to communicate clearly without advocating policy options. They noted that effective communication with policymakers and sticking to only research findings do not come naturally to researchers in brokering settings. It requires support and competencies, which can be developed through experience.

In this context, good knowledge brokering was perceived to necessitate – somewhat surprisingly – an even greater aversion of political statements than is usually expected of researchers. An interviewee described feeling freer to express opinions in political discussions as a professor than as a knowledge broker since the organisation had a strict policy on how to express knowledge in their reports.

Interviewee N₂

But when I write in the newspaper, I use professor emeritus, not an association with the [name of the organisation]. – If I had used [title] signature, that could be very easily and very quickly taken as a statement from the [name of the organisation]. – As an example, [name of the organisation] has an independent group on [theme]. They have been working independently of the science advice activity – but once in a while, they make a statement. And they want this statement published and signed by

[title of the leader of the organisation]. But here [the leader's title] has taken the decision not to sign it and not to publish it as a report with a stamp of [the organisation] because that report was giving active advice to the recent government about energy policy.

In explaining this approach to knowledge brokering, interviewees stressed that having strong opinions about policy directions decreases the legitimacy of researchers and can fuel controversies in the public debate. Additionally, being too opinionated can hamper the development of trust between policymakers and researchers. An interviewee (N4) described that using a publicly known figure such as a journalist can help in creating an atmosphere of trust since researchers' and policymakers' discussions do not always progress in a productive manner. If these issues are not considered, the brokering was viewed to become less successful as it deters politicians from engaging in productive discussions with researchers.

Interviewee N4

Politicians don't like researchers with strong convictions because they want knowledge, and then the politicians know that there are many ways out of this problem, right? And on the other hand, the [name of the organisation] must think before entering controversies, right? – You have to think about who is presenting research without strong, too strong convictions and then who do you invite, which politicians. – So, which of these politicians do we think can work more productive and be more interested in handling the knowledge? Because we don't want political battles in these meetings; we want the contemplation of problems, right?

The professional logic of academic research aligns well with the interviewees' perceptions of the principles of good knowledge brokering, particularly in avoiding political advocacy, as academic knowledge is expected to be inherently objective. On the other hand, it is also somewhat important to consider the policymakers' view of researchers and their preferences for topical and interesting knowledge. Relatedly, an interviewee (N1) noted that busy policymakers prefer concise, understandable reports and events where they can actively participate rather than just listen to researchers. Policymakers need to feel that their participation is valuable; otherwise, it's challenging to secure their attendance. This showcases how the professional side of brokering is also present, while in a somewhat marginal role, in the organisation.

Findings regarding institutional logics in the Norwegian organisation are summarised in Table 14.3.

TABLE 14.3 Institutional logics and their elements in the Norwegian KBO

	State logic	Market logic	Managerial logic	Professional logic
Source of legitimacy	– The organisation provides trustworthy knowledge in times of information overflow	– The organisation provides brokering activities not carried out by other organisations		– Research findings and researchers' expertise are the basis of brokering
Values	– Policymaking and public debate is supported by science	– The organisation does not step on anyone's toes		– Quality standards of researchers are followed
Aims	– The organisation communicates research clearly to policymakers and publics	– The organisation finds a fitting place in the fragmented field of science-policy interaction	– Committee researchers are motivated to engage in science-policy interaction	– Brokering is not too scientific, concerns relevant topics and advocacy is averted – Status of research is communicated
Activities	– Organisation invites journalists and policymakers to the events	– Organisation translates international reports to national context – Committee researchers prioritise research production and securing funding in the academic markets	– Management aims to effective brokering through supporting and facilitating researchers' work	– Relevant and interesting topics chosen, researchers with interaction skills selected, policymakers given roles, and public facilitators used – Researchers plan, generate and communicate content of events and reports
Control principles	– Elected professors form the board of leaders	– Existing science-policy organisations restrict the possible roles that the organisation takes	– Management decides when to go forward with activities and who participates, leaders decide the overall approach to brokering	– Researchers work amongst themselves and comment on each other's work

5.2 *Maintaining Adequate Distance to Research for Good Knowledge Brokering – The Finnish KBO*

5.2.1 Organising Knowledge Brokering Around Stakeholder Needs, Experimentation and Efficiency

While the interviewees presented academic knowledge, values, practices and norms as the foundation of the Norwegian organisation, the Finnish organisation's operations were described to be based on the needs of ministries, political leaders, universities and researchers, which the leader had met during the establishment of the brokering activities. Relatedly, reacting to societal circumstances such as increasing amounts of information and cross-sectoral characteristics of policy problems was viewed to inspire the organisation's activities. This approach and the way it was carried out were inspired by the leader's views and competencies, which emphasised an innovative and experimental mindset – elements of market logic. Below, an interviewee describes these matters.

Interviewee F4

Yeah, like I said previously, from leg work, from mapping the operational field and from the value and sufficiency of the contemporary models. We know that on both sides, there is frustration and also understanding that there is a need for new practices. And then there are also many challenges. – Also, one reason why we have proceeded like this has to do with development methodology, which comes from the business models of development, from the culture of public administration experimentations and a general philosophy of developmental work.

Experimentation and innovation were also key strategies in selecting brokering activities to undertake, such as trying out practices of gathering and communicating knowledge to policymakers quickly, within weeks. Relatedly, interviewees viewed ministries as crucial partners who enabled these experiments. Success in knowledge brokering was perceived as ensuring that both the ministry and participating researchers were satisfied with the brokers' work.

Although the organisation aimed to cater for different stakeholders' needs, the interviewees described the organisation as an independent entity with the ability to bypass short-term profit motives, similar to the Norwegian one. While presenting ideal knowledge brokering as free from such market-related profit considerations, they simultaneously tied it to the managerial idea of efficiency. Efficiency emerged as one of the key objectives of knowledge brokering in the interviews. Below, the interviewee discusses the role of the organisation as a self-sufficient non-governmental actor and the dynamics of aiming

for efficiency and using iterative processes to produce outcomes that benefit stakeholders:

Interviewee F4

We are kind of floating on our balance, so to speak, which makes it possible that our non-profit activities do not have to follow any pricing system. We can undertake activities which would not necessarily be resource-wise from the perspective of some pricing model but that we consider important in one way or another. – At the same time – we can find ways of working from businesses which are efficient, while the operational models based on quarters can, at worst, result in short-sighted activities, the market logic does, at the same time, force to produce results, we are trying to find the optimal spot, getting best of both worlds.

The competitive edge in the knowledge brokering markets was to be achieved through operationalising elements of managerial and market logic – innovating and piloting new practices, focusing on resource efficiency, and investing in customer experience.

5.2.2 Shaping and Communicating Knowledge for Policymakers – Balancing Professional Knowledge Brokering with the Understanding of Academic Research

Interviewees found it beneficial for brokers to be familiar with and to understand the academic world since this enhances collaboration and interaction. For instance, when acquiring knowledge from researchers using light-weight surveys for the production of reports, the brokers had learnt that framing survey questions from the perspective of policy needs was not enough. Researchers were viewed to provide too thorough answers that were resource-intensive and time-consuming to analyse. Thus, questions needed to be formulated so that they encourage concise and concrete answers.

Interviewee F3

– so that we wouldn't receive an enormous amount of material, we asked which are the three crucial things or which are the central challenges [knowledge brokering theme], so in a way we use our authority, we took the impulses but then we aimed to encourage prioritisation and selection of the most important aspects so that we would get into the core of the issues.

While understanding research and researchers was important, a strong identification with them was not considered ideal for a knowledge broker. An

interviewee (F4) described that knowledge brokers must be able and willing to make compromises that are in dissonance with how research is carried out, such as prioritising tight schedules over academic quality considerations and simplifying and summarising complex knowledge.

Another interviewee (below) perceived it as a strength that they have grown into the work done at the interface of research and society. They described, on the one hand, having an understanding of gaps in researchers' competencies and interaction practices but, on the other, not being "burdened" by personal experiences of working in a research organisation, such as searching continuously for funding, feeling the ongoing pressure to publish and having to consider objectivity. They portrayed this to help in seeing beyond the academic culture and suggesting innovative developments in science-policy relations.

Interviewee F1

– I've seen it beneficial and as my strength in this work, that I have kind of started my work directly at the interface. Research and policymaking backgrounds are very beneficial, then you have deep knowledge of those contexts. On the other hand, it can create limitations simply because you identify with one side or another or because you have very personal career experiences from either of the groups. – I have never had to take care of applying for research funding or had to keep my focus on producing publications. – I have not marinated in there and been tied to that world during my career, so I can perhaps look above it and be braver in suggesting and developing something new.

When it comes to the practical work of knowledge brokering, a service attitude and a co-productive approach were viewed as important. When a ministry was in contact with the organisation, the brokers not only listened to the policymakers' needs but also helped them clarify and delineate them. Such an approach was viewed as central since it increased the potential value of knowledge brokering for policymakers and increased efficiency by decreasing the workload of brokers and helping them choose researchers to contact.

In working with research and researchers, interviewees described competencies in written work and interaction to be at the core of professional knowledge brokering. The organisation had also recruited employees with such experience. Skills in journalism and science communication were described as especially important in clarifying and simplifying complex academic knowledge. An interviewee (F5) with such a background described that they must consider previous feedback from policymakers, imagine and try out rhetoric that would be attractive for policymakers, select the central messages from the

knowledge and omit some others and summarise the contents to an interesting form.

Interviewee F5

– we had around 50 pages of raw text. Then, we had to condense it to five pages. – In this process, it helps to have an aptitude for written work, and also, you have to have some notion of what is important in an issue.

When it comes to workshops arranged for researchers and policymakers, the brokers were described to act like negotiators and to make the motivations and ideas of one group understandable to the other. This was perceived to strengthen trust between the groups and to help the discussion, if not end in consensus, to happen so that the participants understand each other.

In their efforts to adhere to the professional logic of knowledge brokering, the interviewees acknowledged the challenges of balancing the needs of policymakers with the perspectives of researchers, highlighting the necessity of reconciliation. Similar to the Norwegian organisation, political neutrality was emphasised as a key characteristic of professional knowledge brokering. The interviewees noted that solution-oriented inputs, such as research-based recommendations, often need to be toned down and reformulated, for example, as questions. This approach was seen to be more effective since it encouraged policymakers to reflect on the issue without feeling pressured, ultimately fostering a more thoughtful consideration of the research.

Interviewees also mentioned that while researchers' feedback is typically positive, for example, when researchers get to comment on synthesised reports before the reports are sent to a ministry, the brokers had also received criticism for oversimplifying issues and for the research information sounding too provocative. This illustrates the brokers' task of balancing between shaping academic knowledge and respecting its original content by adhering to the accurate interpretation of research and the standards upheld by researchers.

The relationship between the professional logic of brokering and academic professional logic was further highlighted when an interviewee (below) discussed working on capacity-building materials for researchers. They questioned whether it is appropriate to place such emphasis on researchers' competencies and activities related to science-policy interaction when researchers' true motivations and values might lie elsewhere. The interviewee also noted the difficulty in balancing messages that promote the use of scientific knowledge in policymaking with those that emphasise the intrinsic value of research. This

highlights the inherent tension in advancing research for policymaking from both the researchers' and policymakers' perspectives.

Interviewee F5

I have been thinking about the intrinsic value of research in relation to the message of societal impact, that research should be impactful. I thought about this quite a lot actually when we were producing outputs for researchers – That when we emphasise these impact-related issues to researchers, are we harming it (research) in some way. Or, at the same time, one should be able to speak about the intrinsic value of research, but it is rather a difficult combination, or that's how I feel.

Findings regarding institutional logics in the Finnish organisation are summarised in Table 14.4.

TABLE 14.4 Institutional logics and their elements in the Finnish KBO

	State logic	Market logic	Managerial logic	Professional logic
Sources of legitimacy	– The organisation develops new practices that help with the contemporary societal challenges	– The organisation answers to stakeholder demands	– The organisation follows the leader's vision and competencies	
Values	– Policymaking is supported by research, and the field of science-policy interaction is developed	– The organisation is agile and innovative in knowledge brokering	– The organisation is resource efficient	
Aims	– The organisation helps research to get into policymakers and produces new practices for science-policy interaction	– There is continuing policy demand for the organisation's work, and the organisation is at the forefront of science-policy practices	– The organisation learns efficient ways to use its resources	– The participants of knowledge brokering are happy with the process and results, and there is an increase in good knowledge brokering practices

(cont.)

TABLE 14.4 Institutional logics and their elements in the Finnish KBO (*cont.*)

	State logic	Market logic	Managerial logic	Professional logic
Activities	– The organisation supports capacity building of policy-makers and researchers	– The organisation produces knowledge synthesis and arranges dialogue events based on the (perceived) needs of policymakers	– The group iterates on its ways to carry out knowledge brokering	– Knowledge brokers develop their competence and practices, and best practices are shared with other knowledge brokers
Control principles		– Activities and experiments are not similar to those of other national actors	– The group chooses closely which projects it takes up considering its limited resources	– The outputs and events are based on the group's ideas of quality – Researchers are consulted before publishing knowledge synthesis

6 Discussions and Conclusions

This study aimed to scrutinise organisational hybridity and the role of academic research in knowledge brokering organisations. Previous studies have paid significantly less attention to this organisational side of knowledge brokering, focusing on its individual and practice-based aspects (MacKillop, Quarmy, & Downe, 2020). The analysis illustrated the coexistence and varied operationalization of multiple institutional logics – state, market, managerial, and profession – within the studied organisations. It also showed how the orientation towards academic research is a significant component in defining the “bricolage” (Freeman, 2007) of these logics in KBOs. The findings highlighted how the arrangement of institutional logics represents two hybrid models of knowledge brokering – the hierarchising KBO and the differentiating-and-combining KBO. We neither consider these to be the only possible hybrid models for KBOs nor the only possible ways to arrange the specific hybrid models (hierarchy and differentiation-and-combination could be manifested differently than in the studied organisations).

The Norwegian organisation's way of arranging hybridity is about following academic perspectives, meaning researchers' initiative, expertise, norms and values in planning and carrying out knowledge brokering. While this approach is about prioritising one logic – academic profession – it does not represent conforming hybridity (cf. Mair, Mayer, & Lutz, 2015) since other logics are still a relevant part of the organisation's operations. The management-level brokers were left with the task of making the organisation's approach effective by bringing managerial and professional considerations of brokering to guide committee researchers' activities in producing reports and arranging events. The managers' room for manoeuvre was rather limited and led to hardships, not only because they had to follow academic principles and depend on researchers' skills but also because the researchers were primarily employed by their universities and thus tended to prioritise their academic work. The managers' work became based on rules of thumb: motivate researchers to knowledge brokering, select researchers that can communicate clearly without advocating for policy solutions and try to guarantee policymakers' interest in reports and participation in events. This arrangement can be viewed as characterising a *hierarchising* KBO (Besharov & Smith, 2014), where the organisation uses the logics prevalent in the academic world over others to reach its aim of informing policymaking with research. In this arrangement, quality in knowledge brokering is primarily tied to epistemic robustness, while policy-related considerations are given somewhat marginal value (Lentsch & Weingart, 2011). As De Doná (2021) suggests, science-policy interaction organisations with strong research membership tend to align closely with academic values and considerations rather than emphasising the meeting of policy needs.

The Finnish organisation's arrangement focuses more on mediating between the policymakers' needs and researchers' expertise, following the values of efficiency and innovativeness. Academic research, and especially academic knowledge, is not as much followed as shaped and steered in line with brokers' varied competencies, standards and goals in arranging workshops and producing knowledge synthesis and capacity building materials. Here, the combination of knowledge brokering professional logic as well as market and managerial logic form an orientation for the organisation's operations. This is an example of a dissenting hybrid which does not identify with one logic but innovates by combining logics (Mair, Mayer, & Lutz, 2015) and differentiates logics by upholding productive tensions between them (Murray, 2010). Brokers need to face the challenge of reconciling between adequate influence on and respect for academic knowledge and stakeholder needs. In such *differentiating-and-combining* KBO, quality is constructed of mixing and matching scientific

and political considerations (Lentsch & Weingart, 2011), and the understanding of quality depends on practice and situation of knowledge brokering. This arrangement is also in line with previous findings regarding the relevance of market and managerial considerations in KBOs (MacKillop & Downe, 2023; MacKillop et al., 2023). On the other hand, the findings portray interestingly how elements of market and managerial logics are operationalised, not only to legitimate action but to drive action and quality considerations. They blend into professional work in the form of resource efficiency considerations and creating and trying out new practices.

The study supports findings on differences in knowledge brokering practices, varying emphasis given to academic and policy-related considerations, and the ongoing relevance of trade-offs in science-policy interaction (e.g., Turnhout et al., 2013; Sarkki ym, 2014; Davies, Powell, & Nutley, 2015; Wyborn et al., 2018; De Doná & Linke, 2023; MacKillop et al., 2023). Moreover, the study increases understanding of the dynamics within KBOs, shedding light on what Gustafsson and Lindskog (2018) have termed the black box of science-policy organisations. It portrays how KBOs, drawing from different institutional logics, assemble their versions of good knowledge brokering (cf. MacKillop & Downe, 2023). It is noteworthy that the leaders and managers of KBOs use considerable influence in this process by constructing the overall approach to connecting research and policy; establishing, upholding and developing KBO's market position; managing KBO's resources; and producing conditions for the professional side of brokering work.

While our focus was not on assessing the organisations' societal contributions, our findings include insights into the organisations' value for their stakeholders. We do not argue here that one of the hybrid arrangements would be better for specifically informing policy than the other. The Norwegian KBO operates as a conduit for academic expertise and provides researchers a platform to communicate the messages they deem significant. While the organisation's relevance for policy is constructed mainly only by communicating in policymakers' language and assigning policymakers with roles in events, the hierarchical arrangement of logics supports researchers in using their voice. This enhances the communication of researchers' own understanding and mitigates the risk of oversimplifying the epistemic complexity of academic knowledge in favour of policy impact. The organisation focuses on the delivery of academically credible knowledge, which can help in forming a high-quality knowledge base in policymaking (cf. Kowalczywska & Behagel, 2019). The Finnish organisation's value can be attached to its direct relevance to policymaking – policy needs as the starting point of activity – and its role as a change agent in the field of science-policy interaction. This emphasises the goal of creating better conditions for informing policy and strengthening the professional

side of brokering. It is crucial to note that the organisation's strong alignment with policy needs may demand more targeted and actionable outputs, which require constant negotiation between scientific credibility and policy usability. This and the need for ongoing construction of the organisational credibility and legitimacy are the challenges that an organisation balancing with multiple logics faces (cf. Kowalczyewska & Behagel, 2019; MacKillop & Downe, 2023).

Thus, we underline that in addressing and managing hybridity as an integral component of their operations, KBOs produce arrangements that not only represent their versions of knowledge brokering but also define their approach to evidence-based policymaking and academic integrity. The hierarchising arrangement here *supports and operates with the fundamentals* of evidence-based policymaking. The differentiating-and-combining arrangement is connected here to *designing settings to maximise the possibility* of evidence-based policymaking and *developing the system* of evidence-based policymaking. As for academic integrity, rather than assuming that simplification of knowledge leads to distortion, we suggest that academic integrity is situationally constructed within KBOs and that the ability to uphold it depends on how the organisations manage competing logics.

For universities, then, KBOs are actors that support the organisational goals of societal relevance and the hybrid work of researchers (cf. Pekkola et al., 2022). KBOs can also be viewed to provide universities with new means to adapt and respond swiftly to societal changes while enhancing evidence-based policymaking (cf. Locke, 2009; Head, 2015). Our study underlines the importance of acknowledging that the nature of this support varies.

Furthermore, while we view hybridity as a manageable condition and present its arrangements to lead to various kinds of outcomes, we do not mean that the practical implications of hybridity could not lead to failures. These can mean failures from the perspective of the stakeholders, the organisation or the pursuit of evidence-based policymaking.

In conclusion, it is important to recognise that the role of knowledge brokering organisations at the interface between academic research and policymaking is complex and depends on various contextual factors. In enabling the communication of research to policymakers, KBOs are also communicating their own version of the research knowledge and desirable science-policy relations. This raises important questions, such as how much knowledge brokers should shape academic knowledge or influence national science-policy arrangements and where the boundaries of good knowledge brokering should lie. These questions and other issues raised in this article offer a practical basis for reflection for knowledge brokers, policymakers, and researchers alike. They can be beneficial, for instance, to researchers or policymakers in deciding whether they want

to engage with a particular kind of KBO or not and in imagining and designing organisations and possibilities of science-policy interactions.

Future research would benefit from exploring how different organisational arrangements influence the utilisation and perceived value of knowledge across various stakeholder groups. Additionally, examining researchers' perspectives could offer valuable insights into how academic knowledge persists and adapts within the hybrid structures of KBOs, shedding light on how these organisations balance academic integrity with stakeholder demands. It would also be interesting to explore further the different hybrid models of KBOs as well as the idea of responsible or ethical knowledge brokering and how the issue is being addressed in KBOs. Understanding these dynamics and issues is essential for developing the role of KBOs as intermediaries connecting research and practical application across sectors.

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PART 4

Conclusions



Defining and Typologising Hybridity

Resilience Mechanisms and Crises Responses in Nordic Higher Education

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Abstract

This chapter summarises insights into the concept of hybridity in Nordic higher education institutions (HEI). Against the backdrop of economic shifts, digital transformation, and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, hybridity emerges as both a challenge and a resilience mechanism. The book identifies hybridity as the coexistence of conflicting logics, roles and practices at institutional, organisational and individual levels. It manifests itself in four domains: institutional logics, missions and responsibilities, work tasks and practices, and the co-creation of knowledge and value. These manifestations reveal how Nordic universities balance traditional academic values with market-driven reforms, integrate digital tools into core academic functions, and engage in collaborative knowledge production. Hybridity also serves as a strategic response to crises, enabling institutions to maintain continuity while navigating competing demands. Further, it promotes resilience by fostering flexibility and innovation in governance, teaching and research. This chapter presents theoretical typologies to understand the emergence of hybridity and its implications for organisational practices and societal engagement. Ultimately, hybridity encapsulates the evolving identity of Nordic HEIs, shaping their ability to adapt to global and local challenges while maintaining academic integrity.

Keywords

crises – higher education – hybridity – Nordic – resilience – typology

1 Introduction

The Nordic HE sector, like HE worldwide, has experienced significant changes in its operating environment. These changes are often labelled as crises. However,

as Tight (2024) argues, most of them could more accurately be described as problems or challenges. Changes in the funding and market governance of HE typically fall into this category. As discussed in previous chapters, Nordic HE has undergone government-led reforms since the 1990s, integrating market-based elements with traditional collegial governance and academic values such as autonomy and professional accountability. These reforms aimed to rationalise the governance and practices of HEIs by applying principles of market efficiency, with a focus on clarifying roles, responsibilities and accountability profiles. The resulting changes have challenged academic freedom and altered the notion of institutional autonomy. In a world of economic scarcity and multiple sources of funding, autonomy depends on many stakeholders – not just the relationship with the state. This fundamental change has led to a deeper hybridisation in various aspects: between organisational and professional logics (Evetts, 2009), managerial and academic logics (Pekkola, et al., 2021), and in universities as organisations, in terms of their public and private ownership, control, funding and governance (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017).

Crises, problems or challenges are not limited to changes in the political and financial landscape of HEIs. Rapid digitalisation has led to successive, radical transitions in knowledge work and academic workspaces, most recently evidenced by the rapid rise of generative language models. While changes in the governance and funding of HE have primarily entered academia through management and policy channels, the adoption of digital tools and platforms is inescapably shaping the daily work of academics (de Andrade et al., 2023). Teaching has adopted remote formats, academic literature has moved online, and much educational activity now takes place on digital platforms. The presence of the academic enterprise now necessarily involves digital experiences – creating new hybrids between physical and digital (De Caro Barek & Støckert, 2024), on-site and remote (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023), and human and non-human (Fenwick, 2015).

Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic represented a major crisis across all Nordic countries, placing unprecedented strain on society as a whole, including the HE sector (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Each country, however, responded to the crisis in distinct ways. For instance, Sweden kept much of its society open longer, while Norway and Finland implemented stricter lockdowns. Shortly after, in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, both Sweden and Finland reassessed their long-standing policies of neutrality. Finland, sharing an extensive border with Russia and with a history of conflict, moved swiftly to join NATO in 2023, while Sweden followed in 2024 after a more cautious and politically debated process. Interestingly, despite often being perceived as a united

front, crises such as these tend to reveal also the underlying differences in policy approaches among the Nordic countries – making the comparisons across countries and institutions discussed in this book all the more relevant.

As Nordic HE is not primarily funded through tuition fees, its financial conditions remained relatively stable, avoiding an urgent shortfall in income and funding – albeit with fluctuations in external research funding. However, the hybridity between managerial (or administrative) and professional (or academic) logics became evident during the crisis. The pandemic disrupted everyday academic work, rapidly transforming academic workspaces into digital forms and challenging human interaction. Here, the hybridity of academic work – combining face-to-face and remote formats, as well as human and non-human interactions – served as a coping mechanism to manage the crisis. On a broader scale, the Russian invasion of Ukraine further disrupted academic work, limiting both physical and virtual collaboration and, in some ways, deepening the crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the next section of this chapter, we explore the forms and definitions of hybridity in Nordic HE during these crises. First, we describe different definitions of hybridity in HE. Then, based on these definitions, we develop a typology of the concept. Finally, we conclude the chapter by positioning the discussed hybrid arrangements as resilience mechanisms in HE.

2 Hybridity Defined

Despite its popularity in academic and policy communities, hybridity remains a contested concept (Pekkola et al., 2021). At its core, hybridity refers to the coexistence of impure forms between pure types (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017). The chapters in this volume offer nuanced perspectives on hybridity. In Chapter 2, Johanson et al. argue that hybridity is an inherent feature of global HE. They suggest that the parallel and often conflicting demands placed on HE require hybrid solutions to address practical constellations within global discourses and practices. Given the complex, multifaceted and multilateral context of policy-making in HE, universities provide an ideal setting for theorising hybridity.

In Chapter 4, Perkins notes that HE organisations operate in environments shaped by different policy directives, funding structures and logics. These environments exhibit significant internal variation in values, governance mechanisms, operational characteristics, and the goals of individual workers. Hybridity theory, with its focus on conflicting demands, values and norms, is

particularly well suited to understanding organisations in crisis, as crises often expose and magnify conflicting motivations and values. As Mikkonen et al. describe in Chapter 13, some HEIs are inherently hybrid organisations due to their legal status, organisational structure, funding, ownership and governance. Accordingly, in Chapter 10, Rajala highlights their multiple responsibilities. Beyond universities, national innovation systems are designed to harness academic knowledge for policy making. Hybrid organisations carrying out knowledge brokering, as discussed by Kärkkäinen and Muhonen in Chapter 14, serve as examples of actors that support and manage the interface between HEIs and broader society.

According to Lundborg and Geschwind in Chapter 5, universities are highly reactive to external pressures, adapting to and trying to shape their external realities. Adaptation often takes the form of increasingly complex internal governance structures, with expanded management teams, new categories of support staff, and hybridisation of roles and organisational principles. Two recent developments – marketisation and the pandemic – have been particularly influential. In Chapter 3, Pöysä-Tarhonen discusses hybridity in post-pandemic HE, extending the definition from market-driven educational provision to hybrid spaces that blur the boundary between face-to-face and digital participation. She introduces into the discussion the vision of hybridity and hybrid educational spaces as tools for designing more resilient and sustainable educational systems, both globally and in Nordic HEIs. In Chapter 6, Santos et al. extend the discussion of hybrid spaces to work practices that exist between ‘pure types’, such as non-remote and remote work (Stasiła-Sieradzka et al., 2023).

Hybrid spaces have direct implications for teaching practices. Digitisation – the adoption of digital tools and platforms that transform interactions within professional groups and organisations (Pinheiro et al., 2023, p. 5) – plays a central role in intensifying the hybridisation of academic work. As Asante et al. argue in Chapter 9, digitalisation is also blurring traditional academic roles, integrating digital and ICT functions that were once considered ancillary into primary academic work, thereby creating new hybrid roles. These hybrid roles also emerge in response to new managerial and bureaucratic demands on academics in leadership positions, as described in Chapter 11 by Hedmo and Waks, and in Chapter 12 by Siekkinen et al.

Hybridity also has a moral dimension. In Chapter 7, Juusola explores the concept of nested hybridity and the moral justifications for international HE cooperation (IHEC) in Finland and Sweden in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Using the theoretical lens of justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), Juusola shows how international political changes shape moral considerations

in HE. Similarly, moral concerns arise about the academic autonomy of teaching amid digital transformation, where non-academics sometimes lead primary teaching processes, as noted by Tømte et al. in Chapter 8.

Based on this volume, hybridity in HE can be seen as the blending and coexistence of different and often conflicting values, roles, logics and practices within organisations, individuals and systems. It captures the complexity of adapting to external pressures, internal demands, changing societal expectations and old traditions, leading to the emergence of structures, roles and practices that cross traditional boundaries. At the institutional level, hybridity is manifested in the interplay between academic, market and public sector logics as universities navigate different funding sources, governance mechanisms and accountability frameworks. Organisational hybridity is also evident in the creation of hybrid positions, roles and structures, such as knowledge brokerage organisations that support the integration of academic knowledge into policy and practice. At the individual level, hybridity reflects the merging of academic and administrative tasks, the emergence of new roles requiring both technical and academic expertise and private and public logics, and the increasing influence of digital tools and platforms that blur traditional distinctions between academic and non-academic work. Furthermore, hybridity extends to teaching and learning spaces, where digitisation and remote technologies enable new modes of interaction, creating inclusive environments that integrate face-to-face and virtual participation. The concept also relates to the moral and ethical dimensions of HE, as institutions and individuals grapple with global crises, geopolitical challenges and the implications of outsourcing critical academic functions, as well as the integration of different understandings of ethics and practices when working at the interface between different sectors.

In sum, hybridity serves as a framework for understanding the multifaceted and dynamic nature of HE as it responds to the complexities of rapidly changing organisational environments and policies. To provide a synthetic understanding in the context of Nordic HEIs, we derive two typologies of hybridity from the contributions of the above chapters. The first typology approaches hybridity more thoroughly, according to its different manifestations in the organisation of HEIs and their interaction with the environment, and the associated impacts. The second typology focuses on the processual dimension of hybridity, i.e. the causes of hybridity, understanding it as a response to change. This concluding chapter therefore provides a theoretical backbone for understanding (1) what hybridity 'looks like' within Nordic HEIs and how it impacts on their organisational structures and interactions with their external environment, and (2) how hybridity in Nordic HEIs emerges – and deepens – through a range of different responses to changing scenarios.

3 Hybridity Manifestations in Nordic Higher Education Institutions: A Typology

The book has systematically explored how the hybrid aspects of Nordic HEIs, whether positively or negatively, affect (a) the primary tasks of teaching, research and engagement/innovation, (b) the structural (administrative, regulatory and governance) arrangements that support these tasks, and (c) the norms, values and identities of academics and their communities in different disciplines, and how this d) interacts with changes in the environment. This section approaches the main findings of the volume according to these implications, relating them to each aspect in which hybridity is manifested in Nordic HEIs. This is done with the help of the framework in Figure 15.1, which locates the contributions of the different chapters along two conceptual axes: the horizontal axis denotes the degree of internal or external organisational environment, and the vertical axis denotes the degree to which it relates to the governance of HEIs or to their primary processes/activities. The intersection of the axes forms four different quadrants (Q1–4) that provide a typology of the manifestations of hybridity in Nordic HEIs.

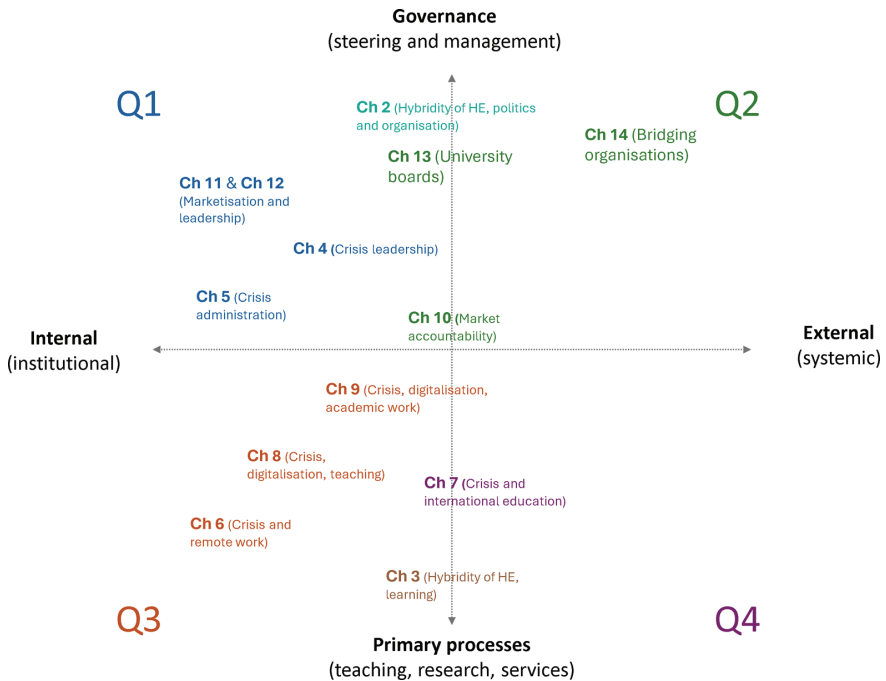


FIGURE 15.1 Book chapters' contributions according to main takeaways

As Pöysä-Tarhonen describes in Chapter 3, hybridity can shape the primary processes of HE. In other words, hybridisation can lead to new configurations of learning, research, teaching and third mission activities, where two or more different tasks or actors work together to create new, hybrid practices (Q3 & Q4). In addition, as argued by Johanson et al. in Chapter 2, hybridity can be part of the systemic setting of HE, where hybrid structures combine different logics of governance and management (Q1 & Q2). Furthermore, the relationship with the organisational environment is an important dimension to consider. Hybridity can manifest itself as new forms of action within an existing organisational setting (Q1 & Q3) or as new or expanded activities reaching out to the organisational environment (Q2 & Q4). Figure 15.1 positions the chapters of the book within the framework and illustrates these dynamics. In the following subsections, we summarise the main contributions of the chapters according to the quadrants (Q1-4) in which they are situated within the framework.

3.1 *Q1: Hybridity of Institutional Logics*

The internal logics of (public) organisations are often strongly influenced by their external environment. Public HEIs, in particular, are subject to competing logics that shape their internal management and governance structures. All Nordic countries are influenced by New Public Management (NPM) related policies (Pinheiro et al., 2019) and have developed management strategies to navigate the competing demands of performance-based funding and professional logics. On the one hand, performance-based steering and competitive funding act as external pressures, while on the other, institutional autonomy and academic freedom create ‘guardrails’ (Smith & Basharov, 2019) to guide universities and maintain balance.

HE leaders need to navigate these dynamics carefully. They are tasked with considering performance metrics to secure funding, while upholding academic freedom and excellence to maintain the institutional ethos of universities. Leading a university in a marketised environment thus becomes an exercise in maintaining balance – keeping the institution ‘on track’ without falling into a funding gap or losing its core identity. At stake is also the core identity of the academic profession, which has always operated within a university framework. Thus, maintaining a hybrid, balanced position between institutional logics becomes critical to the resilience of HEI management and leadership.

In Chapter 11, Hedmo and Waks describe how department heads act as boundary spanners, responsible for communication and maintaining stakeholder relations, while at the same time securing the department’s finances. In the Swedish context, one of the ‘guardrails’ includes a strong component of

publicity. In addition to dealing with market pressures, department heads have to take into account the public ethos, which involves the state as a civil servant. Hedmo and Waks introduce the concept of 'hybrid overload' to describe the complex work of department heads as they strive to keep their units on track, navigating between the competing demands of the dual pressures.

Relatedly, the title of Chapter 12 by Siekkinen et al. "As a Dean, You Are Stuck Between the Top Management and Academia, a Bit Like the Patty in a Hamburger" encapsulates the realities of Finnish HE. Deans see their role as serving academics by avoiding collisions between the "guardrails" and balancing market and academic logics. They do this, for example, by securing and supporting competitive funding while managing academic work and careers.

The internal logics of public organisations can also clash or compete in times of acute crisis. The immediate challenges facing public organisations are often transnational in nature and cannot be solved by individuals or even by individual organisations. As a result, effective communication, administrative culture and coordination become critical to crisis management. The structural-instrumental perspective emphasises formal management structures and is often associated with hierarchical approaches, while the cultural perspective emphasises values, ethos and trust, typically associated with horizontal coordination. Crisis management typically involves a hybrid mix of these two approaches, with, for example, a lead agency playing a coordinating role (Christensen et al., 2016). It is also valuable to examine internal dynamics, such as how different coordination structures operate within the administration and how national structures and cultures influence institutional decision-making. Sweden and Finland provide illustrative examples in this respect.

In Chapter 4, Perkins argues that (institutional) hybridity has the potential to facilitate a deeper understanding of crisis management. In the case of Finnish HEIs, their nature as hybrid organisations was highlighted during the crisis. While university management had previously been predominantly rector-led, the crisis situation strengthened the role of network-based governance. This shift allowed the administrative part of the organisation to participate in management discussions that were typically dominated by academics. However, the role of academic leaders remained critical, as they often acted as network coordinators or lead agents.

In Chapter 5, Lundborg and Geschwind describe the hybrid crisis response in Swedish HE. The onset of the crisis also increased the role of administration in Swedish universities. However, in contrast to the Finnish administrative tradition, the Swedish approach was more top-down and bureaucratic. During the crisis, the administration took control of the organisation, while academics stepped aside. University management was mainly guided by legal principles and decisions based on administrative reasoning to separate right

from wrong. In the Swedish tradition, short-term operational management – the nuts and bolts of decision-making – is seen as an administrative responsibility. In contrast, Finnish universities saw operational decision-making as an academic matter, even in times of crisis. In both cases, hybrid arrangements played a central role in the crisis management process, but in different ways: In the Finnish case, hybridisation allowed for the creation of new relationships between actors, while in the Swedish case it allowed for the shifting of boundaries between what was the domain of each type of actor.

3.2 *Q2: Hybridity of Missions and Accountabilities*

The hybridity of HEIs can be linked to their evolving roles, moving from the traditional ‘ivory tower’ to a ‘multiversity’ (Krücken & Torke, 2007), or as a key component of national and regional innovation systems (Grillitsch & Sotara, 2018). These roles include their integration into the innovation helixes of the knowledge society (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013) and the integration of market-like behaviours described as academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), as well as the emergence of HEIs as entrepreneurial actors, as described already in the 1990s (Gibbons, 1994). In addition, as early as 1983, Clark presented a triangular model of coordination that identified three sources of coordination in HE: the state, the market and the academic oligarchy. Hybridity as a concept captures the variety of overlapping and sometimes conflicting goals and missions within HE that result from all these developments and more. In the Nordic context, the increasing demands from stakeholders have sometimes been described as ‘mission overload’ (Benneworth et al., 2015). This development is often associated with changes in the policy landscape and a more market-driven HE system. Hybridity can thus be understood as a response to these changing demands and the need to address multiple, often competing, objectives.

The increasing role of governing boards in HEIs reflects a response to the marketisation of the HE landscape and the adoption of structures and processes borrowed from the corporate sector under New Public Management reforms (Antonowicz et al., 2023). As described by Antonowicz et al. (2025), university boards exemplify the enhanced role of stakeholders and the growing interconnectedness between universities and society. In these boards, external stakeholders are represented by external members, with the aim of better aligning universities with the needs of the surrounding knowledge society and promoting diversity in decision-making processes (Mikkonen et al., 2025). This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as ‘boardism’ (Veiga, Magalhães, & Amaral, 2015), is often seen as synonymous with managerialism (Antonowicz et al., 2025). The increasing prominence of boards also illustrates the declining role of national governments as the sole source of ‘omnipotent’ guidance for

HE. Instead, it reflects an effort to integrate HEIS into societal development while maintaining their increased autonomy. Boards thus represent a hybrid space where the logics, goals and inspirations of HE intersect. As Doer et al. (2020) argue, resilient organisations can communicate across levels, engage with external stakeholders and, in parallel, adapt their internal functions to cope with the disruptions caused by the crisis.

In Chapter 13, Mikkonen et al. present an interesting case study of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), also known as polytechnics, and their boards. Since 2014, all Finnish polytechnics have been operating as limited liability companies, with the rector acting as the CEO responsible to the university board. Despite their private organisational structure, polytechnics are almost entirely funded by the state through a performance-based funding model, and tuition remains free for national and EU/EEA students. The boards operate at the intersection of market, public, social and academic values, integrating these perspectives to shape the hybrid missions of the UAS. This (mission) hybridity could increase the resilience of HEIS in the face of changing political and financial environments.

However, HEIS with hybrid missions have 'multiple lovers' and consequently multiple responsibilities to manage. In Chapter 10, Rajala examines the market accountability of HE through a Norwegian case study. His Chapter is an important reminder that macro-level phenomena such as market accountability are not just aggregate or institutional issues. Instead, they have numerous individual parallels – each teacher experiences market accountability differently. Even in teaching, universities are not monolithic entities with uniform hybrid accountability structures. Rather, they function as platforms that host a variety of programmes and individuals, each of which navigates shared and conflicting accountabilities.

Moving from mediating bodies – such as boards – and mechanisms – such as accountability – to system-level structures of hybridity, Chapter 14 by Kärkkäinen and Muhonen increases our understanding of Finnish and Norwegian Knowledge Brokering Organisations (KBOs) as a system-level response to align the logics of academics with the needs of other knowledge users in society. Interestingly, cultural differences emerge between these two Nordic countries, both known for their strong university-society linkages. In Norway, academic logic is observed to predominate, while in Finland the focus is more on mediating between the needs of policy-makers and academics. In both contexts, KBOs serve as platforms for universities to support their organisational goals of societal relevance and to facilitate the hybrid work of academics. These organisations represent a structural response to the growing demand for the use of academic knowledge for social and economic purposes. They also highlight

the challenges of reconciling the hybrid logics of different knowledge users. While universities have internal structures to promote the application of academic knowledge – such as targeted funding instruments, governance systems and supportive legislation – there remains a need for separate organisations outside academia to fulfil this role.

3.3 *Q3: Hybridity of Work Tasks and Practices*

Drawing on the study of professions, Evetts (2009) has described a shift in professionalism from occupational to organisational. Whereas occupational professionalism is rooted in professional values, ethics, mutual trust and collegial authority and control operationalised by practitioners themselves, organisational professionalism is influenced by NPM. This is where the discourse of control is manifested and used by managers. It also involves hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making, with an emphasis on performance review and accountability.

These opposing logics and values between the occupational and the organisational are also referred to as professional and managerial, which are particularly at odds in academic management work (see Siekkinen et al., 2019). These opposing aspects come together in hybrid professional work, where they meet and coexist. Hybridity aims to overcome these contradictions in the concrete work of professionals (Noordegraaf, 2015). In Noordegraaf's four-stage model, that describes a process, the pure types of professionalism (pure professionalism and controlled professionalism) emerge as a hybrid: managed professionalism. In his model, the fourth type is conceptualised as organising professionalism, which goes beyond hybridity and where roles are embedded and where 'professionals take organising seriously' as they are also better able to deal with contradictions in their work with other professionals (Noordegraaf, 2015, 201).

Consequently, hybridity as a concept is used to describe not only hybrid logics within an institution, but also the changing nature of work in response to mission overload, multiple funding sources and multiple responsibilities. In HE it is also used to describe the hybridity of academic work, which can be closely associated with conflicting logics and values, particularly at the level of individual roles and identities. Hybridity in academic work has also been described as involving different tasks (Pekkola et al., 2021) – for example, the hybridity of managerial and academic tasks, or administrative and academic tasks. In addition, as sectoral boundaries have blurred (Siekkinen et al., 2022), academics are more often involved in entrepreneurial activities, which has created the new class of 'entrepreneurial scientists' who combine academic research with its commercial exploitation (Lam, 2015), creating new types of entrepreneurial hybrids in academic roles.

The new roles of Heads of Department described by Hedmo and Waks, in Chapter 11, illustrate such hybridity, which not only reflects institutional logics but also affects the nature of individual work. Similarly, new types of roles merge support functions and academic responsibilities, such as roles focused on the outreach of university services.

Digitisation has introduced new types of hybrid roles, particularly in relation to digital pedagogies and research support functions (e.g., open science, big data), which are now increasingly intertwined with academic responsibilities. In Chapter 9, Asante et al. describe how the forced adaptation to digital tools has blurred the boundaries between academic and non-academic work. This increased hybridity also required collaboration with external experts in core university processes, such as the organisation of teaching. Interestingly, digitalisation has the potential to change the role of universities as owners of their own work processes. When teaching, assessment and other tasks take place on commercial platforms, these platforms in turn influence academic content and processes (de Andrade et al., 2023).

A similar debate continues in the public sector. It has become clear that digitalisation is more than just digitisation; it affects the content of the services themselves, redistributing ownership among different stakeholders. This often leads to situations where public sector officials lack the resources or skills to develop services independently. In Chapter 8, Tømte et al. draw attention to new forms of control over academic work, where ‘new experts’ – individuals with lacking prior hands-on experience in pedagogical approaches or HE teaching – are tasked with coordinating academic work. Using structuration theory, Chapter 8 broadly describe how digital infrastructure serves as both a medium and an outcome of practices, further blurring the boundaries between the digital and the human. The authors argue that digitalisation is fundamentally reshaping academic work, bringing with it a complex mix of opportunities and challenges.

Digitisation also has a hybridising effect on actual work practices. Hybrid work can include blended forms of work, such as remote work or tasks that combine human and non-human elements. In Chapter 6, Santos et al. examine how the COVID-19 pandemic forced changes in the work practices of academics and academic managers. These disruptions altered systems of teaching and academic work organisation, resulting in lasting changes in work practices even after the immediate effects of the pandemic had subsided.

3.4 *Q4: Hybridity of Knowledge and Value Co-Creation*

The fourth type of hybridity refers to hybrid practices that involve external actors in academic work. As discussed earlier, the blurring of roles between

academics and support services can contribute to this hybridity – especially when digital infrastructure for teaching, assessment and learning is outsourced to third parties. Hybrid practices also extend to the content of academic work itself, as value can be co-created with other stakeholders. Notable examples include citizen science, applied research projects and continuous learning activities.

In this book, hybridity in value creation is not extensively discussed in relation to crises, marketisation or COVID-19. However, Juusola provides a notable exception in Chapter 7 through a case study of a more acute crisis – the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This case presents a far more complex picture of the hybridity of academic work than typical examples such as citizen science. In this context, academics had to navigate moral considerations when working with Russian and Ukrainian counterparts.

National foreign policies had direct implications for HEIs, and individual academics were forced to critically evaluate their collaborations. This included a careful assessment of the regulations imposed by their funding agencies, institutional partners and sanctions legislation. Such circumstances highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of hybrid value co-creation in academic work in times of geopolitical crises.

4 Hybrid Responses for Nordic Higher Education Challenges and Crises

As highlighted in the introductory Chapter 1 to this volume, the multiple manifestations of university hybridity often occur in response to crises or shifts in different arenas, such as political, economic and technological. Such shifts, faced on different fronts, challenge the position of universities as multi-layered institutions that provide hybrid responses to environmental cues at different levels (Pekkola et al., 2022). Therefore, hybridity in its different forms (Q1-Q4) can be understood through the different factors that justify its development – crises, multiple demands, digitalisation. Hybridisation can also be a resilience mechanism that serves to protect the core nature of the HEI entity, ensuring only sufficient transformation to successfully adapt to the new environment.

4.1 *Hybridity as a Resilience Mechanism*

The ability to merge different institutional logics and practices makes hybrid organisations well suited to cope with the complexities of modern organisational environments (Güngördü-Arnoğlu & Tunçalp, 2024). As discussed in the chapters, hybridity serves as HEIs' response to a changing environment in

which old and new, traditional and novel, or even competing and alternative ways of organising or practicing are intertwined. Hybridity is thus shaped by its temporal context. For example, as Santos et al. describe, in the aftermath of COVID-19, remote working and hybrid modes of teaching and learning became the new 'normal', with face-to-face activities unlikely to fully return. What is considered hybrid today may become standard practice in the future, and even a 'new' pure form. As an example, Noordegraaf (2015) describes the process of changing professionalism, and how the process starts from pure types to hybrids, which may eventually lead to a 'beyond hybridity' model, where professionals are connected to other professionals and different aspects of work become natural parts of it, such as organising collaboration and innovation.

As such, hybridity reflects societal change, functioning because of government reforms, as an inherent feature of societies where competing logics coexist, or as a medium for collective action that transcends traditional societal divisions. As Johanson et al. note in Chapter 2, HEIS make ideal organisations for studying hybridity as a mechanism of organisational resilience. The research and teaching identities of academics evolve slowly and, structurally, HEIS have shown remarkable resilience in balancing continuity and change. This resilience, enabled by hybridity, allows HEIS to respond to external pressures while preserving their unique identities. Consequently, the success of future HE policies may depend on understanding the multiple characteristics of hybridity and its embeddedness in HEIS.

4.2 *Hybridity as a Response to Crises*

As Doerfel et al. (2020) argue, organisational crisis and organisational resilience are two sides of the same coin. Hybridisation can be a deliberate or emergent process to adapt to changing environments (Güngördü-Arioğlu & Tunçalp, 2024). Hybridity can also be a response to crises, whether structural or fleeting, although the interplay between hybridity and crises is complex. As Perkins notes in Chapter 4, changes in hybridity can themselves become potential causes of crises, while crises can change an organisation's hybridity. In addition, organisations may deliberately adjust their hybridity 'mix' as a strategy for managing crises. For hybrid HEIS, the complex and changing environment could also lead to a variety of creeping crises that HEI managers need to be aware of (Perkins et al., 2024).

Hybridity could also be seen as diversity in HEIS. In times of crises, diverse and hybrid experiences and activities can protect HEIS, as in exceptional societal events some activities may suddenly become unsustainable or require extensive adjustments (e.g., in teaching). Similarly, in research, narrowly focused research profiles and strategies may offer short-term competitive advantages but simultaneously undermine the long-term resilience and

sustainability of both HEIs and broader society, especially in times of crisis. For instance, a specific area of medical research might seem like a poor use of resources in one societal and temporal context – until a new pandemic emerges and previously overlooked knowledge suddenly becomes strategically vital.

Recognising diversity in HEIs can also support crisis management, as a better understanding of different groups and their needs enables more effective and tailored communication during emergencies (Perkins et al., 2024). According to Complexity Leadership Theory (Riggio & Newstead, 2023, p. 210):

in complex crises, leaders rely on the adaptive, emergent coordination of many stakeholders, meaning the role of a leader is less about providing direction and more about providing adaptive space for stakeholders to generate novel responses collectively.

Diversity, in turn, offers a broader range of potential hybrid solutions. These not only enhance institutional resilience by enabling more tailored responses to emerging challenges, but also contribute to further diversity by generating new practices, roles, and forms of collaboration.

New and unexpected challenges, such as the sudden shift to remote working and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, required staff, managers and students to adapt quickly and rely on digital technologies. In Chapter 6, Santos et al. highlight how Finnish HE staff were able to self-organise and successfully adapt to this external disruption, reflecting the resilient characteristics of the Finnish HE system.

Furthermore, in Chapter 5, Lundborg and Geschwind emphasise how hybridity in roles and tasks enhances the resilience of universities during crises. Their study reveals that during crises, established ways of doing things often break down in favour of speed, efficiency and security, sidelining complex structures designed to build consensus. Post-crisis management then involves translating renegotiated balances back into a new, adapted status quo. Hybridity provides a vehicle for making such adjustments: by shifting practices, perceptions and roles towards new understandings of what the original ‘purities’ represent in relation to each other, and what can be found in the borderline between them as we move forward.

4.3 *Hybridity as a Response to Multiple Demands*

In turbulent environments, university management faces a dual challenge of responding to societal and global trends while supporting academic professionals in their core functions of research and teaching. Hybridity, characterised by multiple missions and responsibilities, increases institutional

resilience by spreading risks and dependencies. As Lundborg and Geschwind argue, universities rely on meeting multiple expectations to maintain funding, trust and access to critical infrastructure. The presence of multiple expectations can reduce the imperative to conform rigidly to any single one, while the hybridisation of these pressures allows institutions to reinterpret and adapt expectations into more manageable and achievable forms. However, while this diversity of expectations can enhance institutional resilience, it can also contribute to an excessive expectation burden. This may strengthen an institution's capacity of endure challenges, but not necessarily its ability to act strategically or adapt swiftly.

One example of hybridity in response to a changing environment, as described by Mikkonen et al. in Chapter 13, is the transformation of municipal vocational schools into nationally funded polytechnics. This reform not only raised the educational level of these institutions but also reshaped their organisational and decision-making structures. Siekkinen et al., in Chapter 12, also show how universities are increasingly expected to adapt to private sector practices. This shift has implications for academic middle managers who navigate competing logics, practices and values. As Hedmo and Waks note, in Chapter 11, the hybrid role of department heads has expanded to cope with increased performance and market pressures, public service responsibilities, and fostering mutual trust and collaboration.

Finally, crises also highlight the hybrid nature of international HE cooperation. As Juusola's analysis in Chapter 7 shows, accountability to different stakeholders becomes critical in uncertain political contexts. In such situations, hybridity allows HEIs the flexibility to continue their activities while navigating complex demands.

4.4 *Hybridity as a Response to Digitalisation*

Digitisation has profoundly disrupted HEIs worldwide. In Chapter 9, Asante et al. discuss how the adoption of digital tools and teaching platforms – accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – has reshaped professional academic roles and created new hybrid positions. Tømte observes that external stakeholders, such as governments and their agencies, influence on how teachers are expected to incorporate digital technologies and resources into their pedagogical practices in the classroom.

These hybrid arrangements increase institutional resilience but also create interdependencies that can threaten academic autonomy. As suggested in Chapter 3 by Pöysä-Tarhonen, hybrid educational spaces can serve as vehicles for designing more resilient and sustainable educational arrangements.

However, these changes also require careful navigation to balance innovation with the maintenance of academic integrity.

5 Future Avenues for Research on Hybridity in Higher Education in Nordics and Beyond

As outlined in the introduction to this volume, both crisis and resilience are inherently temporal concepts. Consequently, the ways in which hybridity – as an institutional attribute – interacts with them, whether by responding or evolving, are deeply influenced by the passage of time. The research underpinning most of the book chapters was conducted between 2022 and 2025 – an optimal timeframe considering the convergence of key challenges faced by Nordic HEIs, including marketisation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and accelerating digitalisation. However, the transformations underway are far from complete, as evidenced by the recent emergence of large language models and ongoing market and policy disruptions show. The future of hybrid systems in Nordic HE remains open-ended, underscoring the importance of timely research to support policymakers and institutional leaders in interpreting past and present developments – and in anticipating and shaping future trajectories. In particular, there is a pressing need for more longitudinal research capable of tracing how Nordic HEIs respond to the cumulative and interacting forces of change over time.

Longitudinal research can, indeed, shed light on the resilience effects of hybrid arrangements in the long run. This can help to determine whether hybridity has enabled HEIs to uphold their original core functions, or whether the successive layering and blending of logics and structures has reshaped and transformed HE into something altogether different. The threshold between institutional hybrids and what might then be called new pure types can thus be blurred, evidencing how these definitions involve a degree of arbitrariness.

While the studies presented in this volume are deeply rooted in the Nordic HE context, the underlying ideas and conceptualization on hybridization, applied methodologies, and findings offer valuable insights that transcend regional boundaries. The typology presented above is adaptable to other countries and HE contexts, making it an applicable framework for understanding hybridity for researchers in diverse educational and policy environments. By encouraging replication and adaptation in non-Nordic systems, this work aims to inspire a broader international dialogue and foster comparative research that can enrich global understanding.

From an even more critical perspective, digitisation, pursued under neo-liberal pressure, is moving universities in the Nordic countries and elsewhere further and further away from the Humboldtian ideal (de Andrade et al., 2024). This marks a departure from original conceptualisations of what a university is and ought to be, carrying significant implications for the academic profession and the construction of academic identities. Continued incremental hybridisation may, over time, transform Nordic HEIs into organisations of an entirely different nature – perhaps to the point where they are no longer recognizable as universities in the traditional sense, or at least represent a fundamentally redefined institutional form (Alajoutsijärvi & Kettunen, 2016). As with the ship of Theseus, small, incremental changes may eventually lead to the wholesale replacement of all the original parts. Consequently, the dividing line between the ‘original’ and ‘the new’ may then become extremely difficult to determine. How such transformations might affect academia as an institution and reshape the standards and practices of knowledge production in Nordic societies remains an open question. This should be a central focus of research that looks both forward and backward, tracing the nature and distribution of substantive shifts over time.

In addition to comparisons of conceptualisations and mechanisms of hybridity in universities over time, further studies should also consider comparisons of hybridity across spatial dimension. As hybridity represents an interaction between different elements of an organisation’s components and circumstances, it is inherently contextual – making regional traits important variables. The Nordic HE context, which is the focus of this volume, is conventionally defined as a common subset of a wider European HE context (Karran et al., 2023). However, to trace which parts of the hybrid arrangements studied are dependent on this context, studies not only within – but across – contexts would be necessary. Such studies would provide further insight into the specificities of the ‘Nordic’ component of hybridity and how this component might differ between societies.

The Nordic context also sets HE institutions apart from those in many other countries, as they are closely linked to promoting democracy and equality – key values of the region’s strong welfare states. As discourses related to crisis and security have gained prominence, particularly following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, there is a call for research into how hybridity evolves within the Nordic HEIs, especially in relation to the logics and values emerging from the new security environment. It is also important to examine the tensions these new elements create at various levels of HE, particularly in relation to long-standing principles such as democracy and academic freedom.

Furthermore, resilience – advocated for as a trait of hybrid forms – is often framed in a normative way and seen as an imperative for people and organisations, as they must ‘adapt’ rather than ‘resist’ – to continue to exist (see, for example, Griffiths, 2019). A bold question, however, is whether resilience is desirable – the answer to which may vary depending on the field, setting, or interest of the questioner. In some cases, the resilience of organisations or institutions that are perceived as incompatible and misaligned with new social orders might be seen as problematic. However, talking about resilience can sometimes be a softer way of describing a deeper process where an organisation or system is slowly losing its original shape and falling apart. The question then becomes whether the widespread push for resilience is, in fact, driving the slow erosion of institutions – not due to inevitable and neutral technological or environmental pressures, but because of the political choices embedded in how we choose to respond to those challenges.

As HEIs respond to societal change, crises, and digital transformation, policymakers must recognise hybridity not only as a resilience mechanism but also as a structural condition that shape institutional behaviours. To support this complexity, policies should promote flexible governance models that accommodate the coexistence of academic, managerial, and societal logics, while ensuring clarity in roles and accountability. Given the increasing complexity of HEIs – intensified by digitalisation, marketisation, and geopolitical instability – policy frameworks must help institutions balance strategic focus with adaptability. This includes investing in digital infrastructure, supporting hybrid teaching and work arrangements, and fostering leadership development for hybrid roles. At the same time, it is essential to address the risks associated with hybridity, such as role ambiguity, mission drift, and operational inefficiencies, by promoting transparent decision-making processes. In doing so, policies can enhance the capacity of HEIs to remain resilient, relevant, and responsive in an evolving global landscape.

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Hybridity through Transitions

Crisis and Resilience in Nordic Universities

Elias Pekkola, Luiz Alonso de Andrade, Kerttu Kettunen and Stefan Lundborg (Eds.)

This volume investigates how Nordic higher education institutions adapt to crises and long-term reforms by blending traditional academic values with market-oriented governance. Drawing on empirical studies from Finland, Sweden, and Norway, the book examines hybridity as both a structural condition and a resilience mechanism. It explores how universities respond to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation, and marketisation, offering a conceptual and comparative framework for understanding institutional transformation. This timely volume is essential reading for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in the evolving landscape of higher education governance and the future of academic institutions.

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