

The Assessment of Potentials as a Basis to Reform University Management

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Abstract

The Bologna Reform in Europe, which led to systematic changes in academic teaching and learnings structures, finally implemented in 2002, also made a need for reforms at the management level of universities visible. However, approaches to modernize the management structure with components such as strategy and structure, performance measurability, or process economy via key figures have not found lasting acceptance in the administrative landscape yet. Particularly cultural changes towards a motivating working environment for academic and non-academic professionals remained underdeveloped. In this respect, research mainly focusses on questions on how to implement transformation in administrative structures through motivation, a methodical approach to change, establishing jointly lived attitudes and values as well as the design of a sense of commitment and belonging together in a work context. Conceptually, reference is made to the "Theory of Absorptive Capacity" based on Cohen/Levinthal for innovative capacity and the future viability of organizations, including three partial capabilities. This leads to a brief overview of fundamental approaches to change management from the perspective of organizational design to increase the maturity of organizational change. A quantitative survey shows the existing reasons, and why high potentials leave the administrative sector, exemplarily in German-speaking countries. Based on this survey on changes in work requirements, the importance of recruitment and the possibility of winning over 'designers' will be presented. This approach aims to show opportunities to derive recommendations on service initiatives and to launch efficient reforms in the public learning management.

Keywords: Digitization, Panel Study, Upskilling, Skills, Learning Preferences, Management and Administration of Universities

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Introduction

Understanding generational shifts is essential when it comes to digitized educational offers that aim to contribute to current social changes. A change in self-conception concerning participation and in self-determination of the individual, but also the arrival of technology in everyday life, lead to a new and different way of acquisition and processing of information. Meta-shifts in the present world of work are defined by the so-called “Society 5.0.” “A human-centered society that reconciles economic progress with the solution of social problems through a system that highly integrates cyberspace and physical space” (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan 2021). Since the 2010s, innovation has been the focus of social reform, so learning opportunities need to be established “on demand” to support the increasing necessity of dynamic behavior towards new and complex challenges in a practical way. This on the background of a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, so called VUCA world, where vision, understanding, clarity, and agility is needed to deal with massive and numerous changes in short intervals. Innovation is the lever to be pulled by companies as well as by civil service and by universities to transform knowledge into new processes (see Sancho-Zamora et al. 2022, p. 1). Knowledge management capability therefore is a synonym for success, following the concept of absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal 1990). In this respect, course design needs to focus on “domain-specific usable learning outcomes” supported by interactive designs of learning progress. Learning processes that are committed to the recognition of a shared responsibility of teaching learning relationships need to be considered. Achievements, learning success, or learning progress should come as visual experience for each learning objective, designed to be evaluated by learning analytics software. The in-service education market is getting more attractive, from digital teaching to the point of flexibility and individualization of the learning and teaching offers (see Handtke, 2015).

The Starting Point of Reforms

Countries such as Switzerland and New Zealand already approached the modernization of state activities in the 1980s with a broad range of ideas, objectives, proposals, and instruments. But there was no strictly coherent model. Reforms started with changes to formal, legal, and institutional aspects to minimize the state sector by privatizations. Results were less regulations, public-private partnerships, and even total retreat of the public sector in certain fields. Since 2000, reforms of the public service in Germany have been following the optimization of performance and efficiency, of recruitment based on skills and qualifications, of revised qualification procedures, of the importance of skills in different academic disciplines for the public sector, i.e. public management. “This requires a targeted acquisition of competence in systemic thinking of employees of different levels of responsibility, in order to enable the recognition of optimization of potentials as well as sustainability criteria in everyday work processes. Digital tools and dashboards seem to be tools used as means of transparency of the burdens on the climate balance in the course of the provision of services in public spaces” (McKinsey, 2019).

Studies show that employees on management level leave the public sector due to different reasons. Concerning compensation, unmet salary expectations are mentioned. Furthermore, job security was not given, as well as promotion opportunities and attractive career paths. In terms of leadership and culture, a lack of inspiring leaders is reported next to a less innovative organizational culture. Many people state a missing compatibility of family and

career as well as missing training opportunities. Last but not least, benefits for the general public, the main concerns of the public sector, were reported as not distinct.

Organizational learning, more specifically absorptive capacity, and knowledge sharing can be seen as key factors for the public service to keep up with the changing demands of citizens as a result of transformation processes in other parts of their everyday life, such as digitized communication, to recruit and to keep high potentials. This is also valid for universities, either as public service or private institution, in both terms of administration and teaching (see Sancho-Zamora et al. 2022, p. 2).

Hypothesis

Challenges of Administrating Universities lead to Framework Conditions of VUCA. Aspects which pay in to the hypothesis are:

- a new self-conception of students
- reforms of higher education and sources of funding
- competition in the higher education landscape
- reputation measurement based on changed standards with a focus on practical transfer
- control tasks and
- stakeholder management are getting more complex
- recruitment becomes more difficult and
- staff retention gains in importance

Main Perspective

In democratic states, research on higher education and teaching in higher education show the aim of added value (see Berthold et al., 2009). This so-called "third mission" in administration means that research and teaching should include socially relevant questions and, if possible, their inclusion into events. Another level of the interweaving of higher education and vocational training is the conception of continuing innovative in-house education and the optimization of work processes as part of the survey.

Even today, the characteristics of civil service are legal commitment, hierarchy, and loyalty. These are highly formative. However, customer, i.e. citizens', here students', expectations and requirements have changed completely. Therefore, authorities and non-profit organizations need to actively shape social change with measures to optimize and expand services. Technology as a driver for change requires addressing user scenarios in the public interest-oriented range of tasks through collaborative projects with business and science, especially in the provision of services to companies and also citizens (see Matzat et al., 2019, p. 55).

Based on the aim of a user-centered service orientation, the fundamental mindset of public administration should include openness, innovation, solidarity, and agility. Factors necessary to focus the VUCA world. Scenarios to implement change management should not only focus on internal structures and processes, but also on innovation design concerning external services.

In addition to previous values of strict legal conformity and quality orientation, a change in attitude towards innovation is necessary. The models of the 'learning organization' represents

this. Additionally, the concept of absorptive capacity generates advice on an abstract level, which enables the professionalization of service in order to social transformation through agile decisions. The perspective of ‘absorptive’ as ability of an organization to absorb new external knowledge and to combine this with internal knowledge includes innovation in sustainable systems (see Cohen & Levinthal, 1990, p. 128). This requires using assimilated knowledge in a value-creating cycle of continuously expanding proactive-strategic effect.

To transfer the concept of absorptive capacities for the creation of innovative learning processes in typical processes of university management, based on quality-assured standards, the following illustration will outline a schematic procedure.

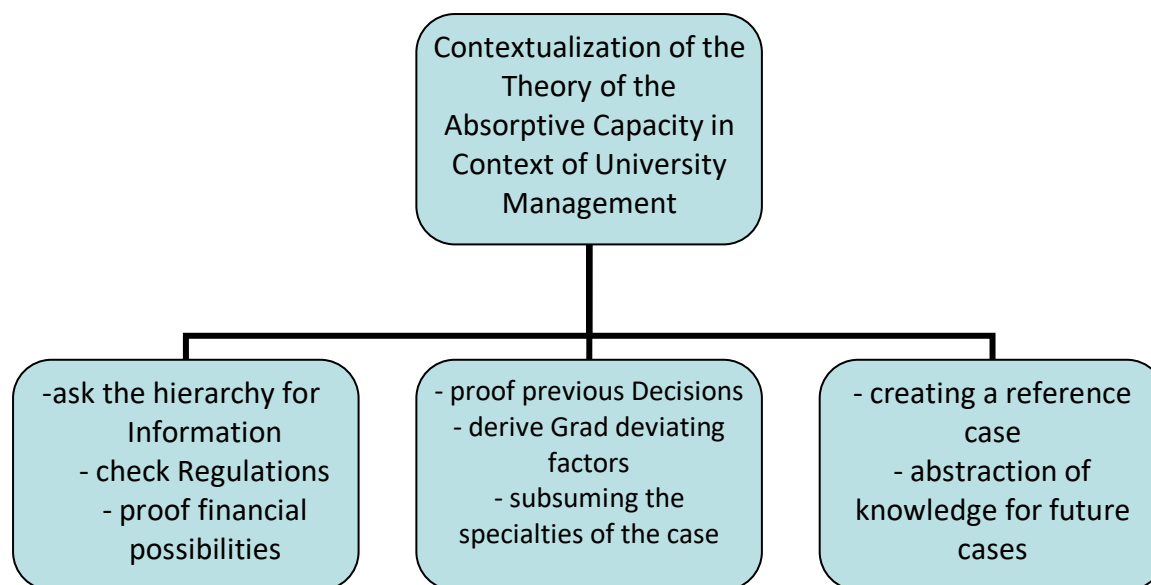


Figure 1: Absorptive Capacity in context of University Management

The mentioned concept of absorptive capacity includes identification and value-enhancing which derives from using external sources of knowledge. Finally, much attention has been paid to the transfer of this concept to ensure corporate success by Zahra & George (2002) in relation to the ‘dynamic capability’ described by Teece et al. (1997). To combine “both internal and external learning processes and thus respond to the demands of the environment through innovation” (Sancho-Zamora et al. 2022, p. 2) leads to an update in core competencies, which means successful changes in an organization. “The ability to learn, meanwhile, makes it possible to generate new internal knowledge, to develop the necessary competencies, to understand the process of knowledge development and, together with the knowledge acquired externally, to achieve innovations that are difficult to imitate” (ibid).

In addition, the hypothesis that increased internal exchange and a highly automated IT structure also have a positive impact on the ability to absorb innovation was not clearly proven empirically. On the other hand, it was possible to prove that strong absorptive capacity of those being managed has a positive effect on the willingness of those being managed to innovate. In order to promote commitment to innovative thought and action processes, it is important to express agility as a central value by communicating meaning, trust, and the transfer of responsibility. In order to be able to communicate agility convincingly, managers must demonstrate an authentic, respectful inner attitude in addition to systemic and group-dynamic background knowledge. This is seen as the only way to build lasting personal relationships with employees, stakeholders, and customers.

Conceptual Basis

The task of local authorities in case of supporting society’s mission to use technology with added value is building digital infrastructures, which make data usage concepts and applications tangible with citizen participation. Introducing the topic of intelligent data analysis and automated data preparation for improved decision-making can be understood as an educational mission. The municipal concepts of ‘Smart City/Smart Region’ might be adapted to higher education due to comparable intentions. With ‘Smart University’, the public mandate to create added value of services via online services might be transferred (see Schachtner, 2020).

‘Digital agendas’, which derive project priorities out of public opinion formation processes, can be transferred to acquire skills within the framework of informal learning and participation formats with different target groups. In turn, research also benefits from results, as new target groups for empirical surveys are created. At the same time, a new strategic level of maturity of colleges and universities can be achieved.

Figure 2 displays the four core areas of the ‘Smart University’ concept (Schachtner, 2020):

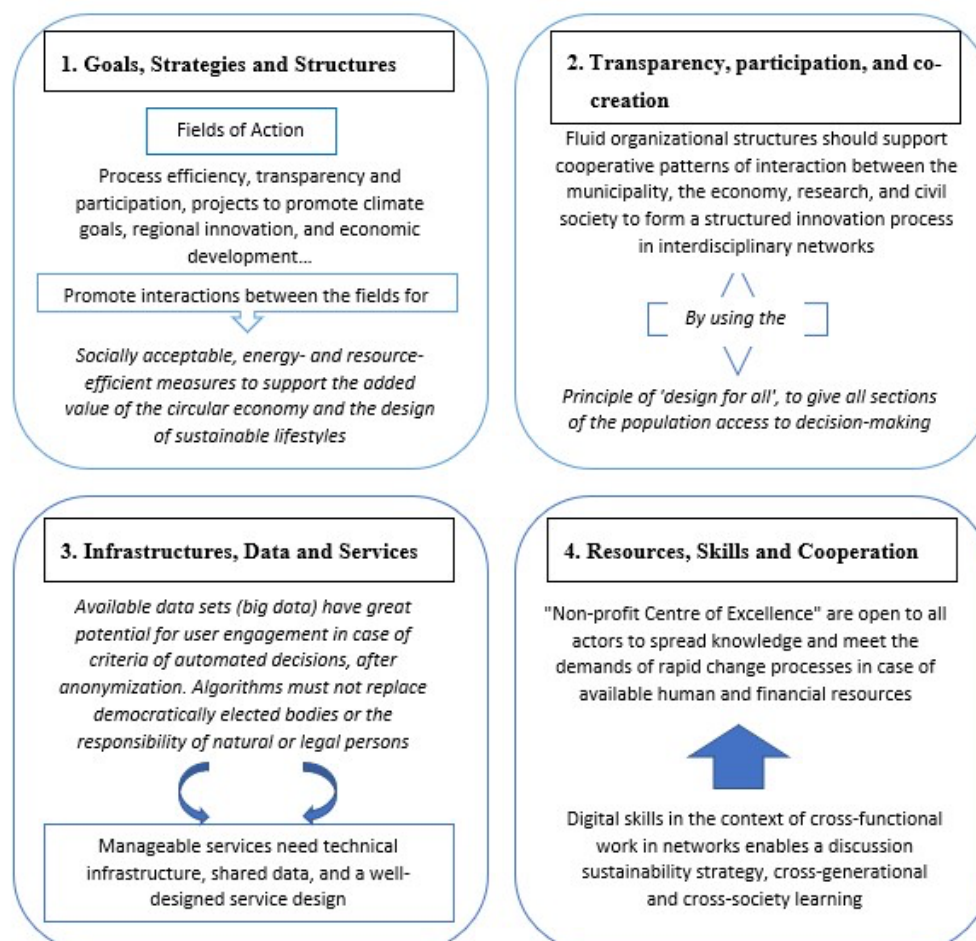


Figure 2: The Concept of the Smart University

Next to application-oriented questions concerning the content orientation of seminar concepts based on digital transformation, planning and decision-making processes on how to deal with the neo-liberal paradigm of the ‘human capital of the actors’ (Stewart, 1999) stands a basic

scientific orientation. In this respect, economic concepts should also be discussed in terms of internal control of public institutions such as lateral leadership, or open innovation management, and the learning needs of specialists and managers in public administration, and therefore universities.

Research design

Based on the previous findings, empirical consideration focusses a full-standardized, anonymous online survey with a closed-question metric procedure. In this context, with a comprehensive look for international requirements of future management of institutional governance in higher educational institutions and its pain points in the age of digitalization, the chances in University Strategies should be able to be identified. Internationally, business and management as well as marketing and communication are the cases, besides digitization, for further education. The panel study aimed at all skills related to securing the ability to stay competitive in the individual business field. In this context, personal skills or skills acquired in informal context are not in the focus of the study. For many people, lifelong learning is the be-all and end-all, in terms of personal development.

The further Procedure of analyzing the management-based aspects of University Management follows these methodical setting:

1. creation of the research question, formation of hypothesis, theoretical modelling
2. pretest in workshop format with experts (N= 12 Managers and CIOs of transforming Universities; February 2023)
3. quantitative-qualitative online questionnaire survey with organizational managers at German universities (10 sets of questions; March – April 2023)
4. Qualitative Text Analysis to prioritize the response range (June 2023)

Data Sources

The focus group of the initial survey will be managers of Universities and Universities of applied Sciences in Germany (n=422). The study was internationally designed, so that different stages of digitally and organizationally transformed systems were taken into account.

The research data collection group consists of scientifically educated adult professionals, established forces of administrative modernization, developers of university strategies, and service managers. It is heterogeneous in terms of teaching experience, gender, and age. Sample based on assessments of, etc. with at least 3 years of operational experience in the field.

Method: Content-analytical evaluation of qualitative data bases

A qualitative-quantitative research design allows to reduce complexity of real-causal relationships in framework conditions to generalize these in the field of trend research (Mayring 2015).

With qualitative analysis methods, the integration of secondary results intends to derive the need for reforms of University strategies.

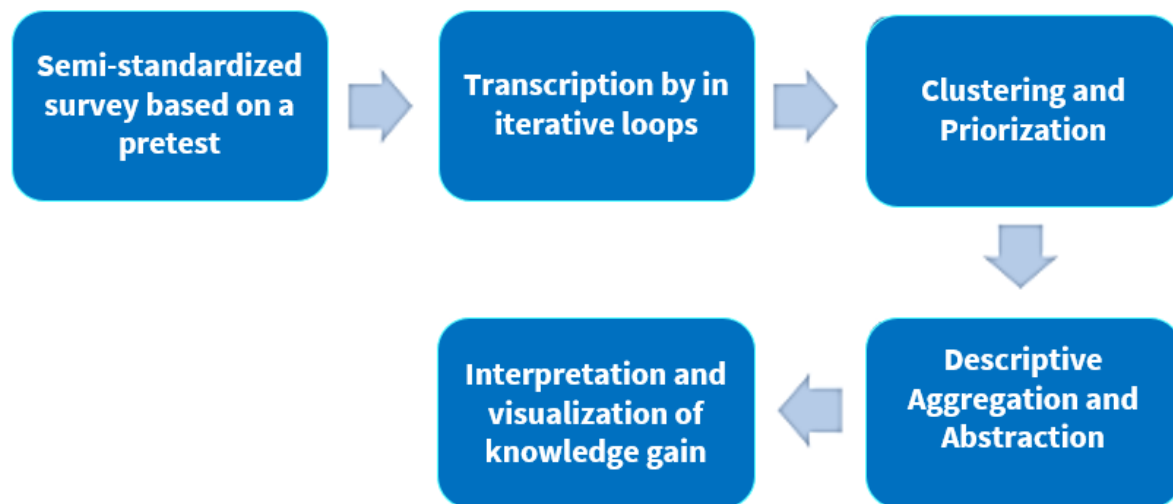


Figure 3: Empirical Setting

The interpretation was carried out by means of qualitative text analysis. Core sentences and summaries of categories represent the range of statements. Restrictive of the survey should be noted that no absolute statements can be derived in the absence of primary surveys in the domain of the General Internal Administration. In addition, the framework conditions and starting points of systematic learning processes for the development of innovation structures were not collected.

Results

Due to the early status of the considerations of this pre-study survey, no final statements can yet be made. Nevertheless, based on the basic assumptions, various starting positions are given in the primary survey for the examination of the target states or preconditions:

What has to be proven are possible input factors in three cluster categories:

A. Business Process Management for analysis

- Before the start of process optimizations, strategy, method, tool, modeling conventions, and a process model should be agreed on.
- Employees need to be involved with appropriate communication measures, they also need Business Process Model (BPM) training, access to BPM tools, and roles to improve processes need to be defined in work groups
- process goals, key figures, measurement methods, and process responsibility for each process must be transparent
- BPM organization, process controlling, and a continuous improvement process for benchmarking in innovation rings needs to be implemented (see Cordella & Iannacci 2010)

B. Frameworks for a Change in the Mindset for a Successful Transformation

For example Liberating Structures (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2010). as a collection of 33 methods support coordination, prioritization, moderation, and goal setting.

C. Data Governance for an End-To-End Digital Data Situation

Effective management of data on basis of the goals, processes, standards, regulations, and responsibilities mentioned under A (see Gabler, 2022).

- Modernization of control systems, e.g. through Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Business Intelligence cockpit solutions as reporting tools.
- Alignment to the individual needs of authorities via KPIs and OKRs, so that the right information is available at the right time for everyday decisions.
- Modernization of the control systems in budget, cash, and accounting through automated instruments of strategic management or impact control of public budgets (see Dezousa et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the deductively developed hypothesis of success chances for the concept of ‘Smart University’ the survey should confirm the following aspects:

Change of framework conditions

Further education is rated as a personal matter. There is no doubt about its importance. Even though one in two people would like to continue their education for professional reasons, there is one thing that is most important to most respondents, which is personal further education, regardless of their profession. Simply because they are interested in a particular subject.

Administration is not in focus, but a managerial necessity

More than two thirds of those surveyed state positive experiences with further education. For more than half of the people, the curriculum perfectly matched their own personal goals. The quality of the learning content and the professional approach of the specialist staff also ranked highly among 46.9% of respondents.

Create incentives as high-potential employees leave facilities

Information is everything, so another result of the survey shows that over half of the people internationally have already found suitable further education courses. The rest are still looking. Those who have already investigated it but have not yet found anything are primarily concerned about the lack of flexible courses with suitable content.

Agile methods as a chance for innovation

Online learning means more flexibility. Even though further education is influenced by current trends, online teaching is generally preferred internationally. Best of all with flexible, self-determined scheduling or in a virtual classroom online at fixed times. In contrast, only very few people prefer face-to-face teaching.

In agile work segments, new processes and methods often emerge more quickly through informal learning than they can be mapped via classification systems. In this respect, qualifications can only ever determine a level entry with a basic portfolio of skills and knowledge, which must be supplemented by industry-typical dynamics of further training and at the same time kept up to date. Therefore, an organizational framework which supports knowledge assimilation, internally and externally, is necessary to perform in a VUCA world and to meet the needs in the field of academic administration, learning and teaching.

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