Requested stream: 13 Public Sector Management and Not-for-Profit
Requested Session format: Competitive

What is the role of collegiality in modern universities? Compositions of governance ideals and governance practices

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ABSTRACT
Universities have been subject to rationalizing reforms for long, not least in connection to the extreme expansion and transformation from elite- to mass-education. Since the turn of the century the introduction of new modes of organizing, allocating resources and measuring and assessing results have more or less exploded. The new forms of governance have challenged more traditional forms, especially collegial modes of governance and of controlling quality. In this paper, we observe the recent reforms and what implications they have had for collegial forms of university governance.

Keywords: collegiality, editing, reforms, universities, governance

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Current debates on university governance

How are universities governed and how should they be governed? Recently those questions have gained quite some attention throughout Europe and US (Tuchman, 2009; Jemielniak & Greenwood, 2013). Observations of the long history of universities show a diffused pattern of repeated reform efforts, largely inspired by what has been seen as most efficient ways of organizing at the time, and following from the shifting roles of universities in society over the years (Maasen & Olsen, 2007). When it comes to the reform trend often called, *New Public Management*, after Hood's early observations of the reforming of public sector organizing and governance in the OECD countries in the 1980's and 90's, universities appear to have been somewhat of a latecomer, but a very active one. True, universities have been subject to rationalizing reforms for long, not least in connection to the extreme expansion and transformation from elite- to mass-education. Since the turn of the century the introduction of new modes of organizing, allocating resources and measuring and assessing results have more or less exploded.

With these transformations, many universities have developed elaborate organizational structures, including new and strengthened management positions, expanded communication departments, and innovation and technology transfer units (Engwall 2013). New modes of result-based allocations of resources have been introduced in university systems as well as in individual universities. In short we can observe a diffusion of more managerial forms of organizing. However, many of the more traditional traits of university governance remain. Traditionally, universities have – in part – been structured as arenas for professions with elected leaders, with a strong emphasis on academic freedom and academic duty as mean to produce output and control quality in research and

education, and with decision-making resting on principles of collegiality and meritocracy (Bennett, 1998; Tuchman, 2009).

The new forms of governance have challenged more traditional forms, especially collegial modes of governance and of controlling quality. While many reforms have met surprisingly mild resistance, they have given rise to quite intense debates on issues of governance and the organizing of universities. At the same time, discussions on collegiality tend to be surprisingly imprecise. What is collegiality? Why is it or should it be an important part of university governance? And where in and around universities do collegial models apply? Despite lively debates on collegiality, these questions are largely left unanswered. In this paper, we observe the recent reforms and what implications they have had for collegial forms of university governance.

Much of the current debate on governance of universities, the need for reforms or the critique thereof, is framed in terms of ideal types. One ideal type model of governance is contrasted to another. The old is put in opposition to the new. We often hear (the challenged or largely abolished) collegiality being discussed in opposition to what is sometimes described as more modern forms of (new public management or corporate inspired) management. University leaders and reformers talk about "line management" in contrast to "bottom up". The latter is an example of how collegiality is understood by the advocators of "line management" principles. As we will elaborate more in detail, the principle of collegiality cannot be summarized as merely a "bottom up" management system.

In practice the organizing and governance of universities turn not to be easily captured by one or a set of distinct ideal types. The practice of governing contemporary universities – as is the case for most operations – is shaped by the interplay of several such models. These models interplay with each other, in the form of checks and balances, or models may overlap or compete. One mode of governance may supplement, challenge, transform, pervert or undermine other modes.

Our observations show how various reforms and adopted models, but also more traditional and institutionalized forms of organizing as well as ideal types of governance are subject to editing (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Czarniawska-Joerges & Sevón, 1996). Such editing forms an integrated part of the governing and organizing. A main message of this paper is that the understanding of such editing processes are essential both for students of university governance and

for those who are governing or are being governed in practice. In analytical terms then, we find it important to shed lights on the procedures and outcomes of such editing. When analysing the mixing and transformation of models in terms of editing we want to highlight that the translation of models and practice are done in the context of each other. Such translations are often done in many steps so that the translation forms an iterative process that is integrated in the governing models and governing practices as such.

In the next section of the paper, we define and discuss collegial forms of governance. We also seek to identify when and where collegiality appears to work, what the prerequisites for this mode of governance are. In the very end of the paper we return to current forms of collegiality and we ask how much mixing of models is possible without perverting collegiality to the extent that it has lost its meaning and rationale. A more theoretical argument that runs through our paper is a critique of the dominance of ideal types of discussions on university governance and in organization theory more generally, to the extent that those ideal types tend to be reified. Such ways of structuring the analysis and debate on university governance and organizing tend to miss much of the dynamics of current governance practice.

Collegiality in theory and practice – an example from Sweden

Most discussed in recent debates, and in reaction to recent re-regulations of university systems, is a formal structure for collegial decision-making (Tuchman, 2009; Jemielniak & Greenwood, 2013). Previously, in Sweden, universities were obliged by the law to have faculty boards consisting of academics and with representatives of the students. These boards had the main responsibility for decisions on content and quality in teaching and research. This included, for example, decisions on curricula, course plans, allocation of resources within the faculty, plans for which faculty positions to announce and how, appointments of lecturers and assistant professors etc. Some decisions, such as the appointment of professors was taken by the rector but after reviews chaired by the faculty board.

The faculty boards had been reformed through a series of steps ever since they were formed with the founding of the first universities in Sweden (Uppsala university, the oldest one, was founded in 1477). One important such reform was when students, became represented on the board. With a change in the law in 2011, presented as an autonomy reform and a deregulation, universities

were no longer obliged to have such boards. Instead, the law said that decisions of the kind exemplified above had to be taken by people with scientific merits, and with influence from the students. A follow up study of that reform showed that almost all universities and university colleges in Sweden have abolished the faculty boards or they have transformed them from being decision-making bodies to having an advisory role (Sundberg 2013). The same study showed that smaller and newer universities had made more thorough organizational reforms, while the oldest universities had largely kept a system with faculty boards as decision-making bodies. This is the aspect of collegiality recently most discussed: the existence of a formal decision making structure that gives decision-making power to bodies where academic staff is in majority. In it's most clear from, persons with scientific competence, elected by their peers, form such decision-making bodies.

Unlike university systems in many other countries, Swedish universities do not have academic decision-making bodies on a university level, such as senates. The historical structure with "konsistorium" (consisting of the body of full professors) as the highest decision making body of the university, has through a number of reforms become shaped much like corporate boards with an external chair and a majority of external members.

A second aspect of the formal structure making up a collegial decision making system concerns the role of academic leaders and how they are appointed (Bennett, 1998; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). The collegiate organizing principle ideally includes a management structure with elected leaders. Leaders who have the support and hereby confidence from their colleagues are elected by them (elected as *primus inter pares*). Academic leadership is in this view ideally formed as a non-permanent, and often not full time, position. Academic leadership is viewed as doing a term of service to the research community. Currently, according to Swedish law, vice-chancellors are appointed by the government, but after nomination from the university board. Previously these nominations have been done after elections by faculty (and from early 1980's also students and staff). This has been deregulated too, so that the board can choose procedure. They are required to consult with students, staff and faculty but the forms for such consulting procedure is decided by the board. Only a few universities have kept some form of election procedure and most universities nowadays use external consultants for recruiting and checking candidates. Still, according to the law, vice-chancellors have to

fulfil some academic criteria – they have to be qualified for a university lectureship. With these developments, the practice of recruiting vice-chancellors, and the qualification of vice-chancellors have changed. As shown by Engwall (2013) the majority of vice-chancellors are nowadays externally recruited and on average those vice-chancellors have lower academic merits– or have experience from other high level academic leadership positions in other universities or university colleges. These changes suggest that academic leadership has become a career track, and is no longer primarily seen as a temporary service for the academic community.

A third aspect of the collegial formal structure is the use of peer review for positions, promotion, research funding and publication (Langfeldt, 2001; 2005; Lamont, 2009). In universities, external experts are used for the reviewing and ranking of applicants to professorship and lectureship positions. This practice provides the promoted applicant support and indication of quality from external, less partial academic reviewers. However, also this aspect of collegiality has been partly compromised through a series of reforms and changes of praxis.

So far, we have described the formal decision making structure of a collegial system. We have seen that this structure has been transformed, and resulted in less legal support for a collegial system. However, as is true for organizational models and governance more generally, collegiality will not work just because the university organizational chart is drawn in a certain way. Collegiality is as much a culture of how work should be pursued, as it is a structure for planning, decision-making, and follow-up procedures. Collegiality should primarily be defined as a work process (Bennett, 1998; Lamont, 2009). When defining collegiality in cultural terms, we need to bring into the picture, why collegiality is seen as important. The main rationale for a collegiate system is that it is seen as the main form for producing high quality research and teaching. The formal arrangement described above all rest on the assumption that decisions and developments should be based on scientific arguments and procedures. The basic principle for how to manage, govern and develop universities resembles the academic seminar. Leaders and decision makers pursue rational and scientifically based argument, and their arguments can be questioned and tested through a scientific discourse. Just like in a seminar and in the production of research results, discussions, criticism and the scrutinizing of arguments and conclusions are core features of collegiate forms of governance (Bennett, 1998; Palfreyman & Tapper,

2010). Leaders, moreover, are there to chair this on-going scientific discussion. This also means that leaders and decision makers are to represent science and the scholarly community as a whole, not a single group of scholars or employees. A further basic assumption is that the research community, and the scientific argument, is wiser than just the individual leaders (Lamont, 2009: Langfeldt, 2001). The system is built so as not to give power to individual leaders, but to form as system where individual leaders and their measures are to be subject to questioning and testing much like the work of individual scholars and individual research results. This does not mean that academic leaders in a collegiate tradition are expected to be weak. Quite the contrary – leaders are expected to take measures based on a scientific argumentation and on scientific qualifications. Additionally, through the election process academic leaders are acting by the support of their colleagues and hereby on the behalf of the community. It is truly a meritocratic system and it is built to be independent of individual interests, all as a basis for pursuing academic freedom – knowledge should always come before interests.

However, as shown by, among others, Maassen and Olsen (2007), the meritocratic collegiate system is easily confused with a system of internal representative democracy, and with the stepwise reforming described above the two systems of collegiality and representative democracy are mixed in decision making bodies. Representatives of staff and students are elected as representatives of specific groups while academics, according to collegiate ideals are elected as ”primus inter pares”, representing science and the scientific profession rather than scientists and colleagues/co-workers. Additionally, some fundamental prerequisites for a collegiate system to function have to be taken into account. When writing about university expansion and the associated transition from elite universities to mass universities, Halsey (1992/2004) emphasized that collegiality assumes a collegium. Collegiality presupposes, of course, that there are colleagues who can listen and talk to each other. Hence, trust, knowledge, knowledge and a continuous dialogue based on and upholding a common set of norms for what is good science, good knowledge and what is the main objectives for universities are basic prerequisites for a collegiate system to function.

Collegiality in other words forms at the same time as a continuous process for establishing what it good scientific practice and how this practice shapes research, education and collaboration. Bennett (1998) emphasized the professional community, professional togetherness, as a

basis for collegiality. This community cannot be formed once and then be assumed as a basis, but is carried and upheld through active collegial activities, such as peer review and seminars. Moreover, the professional arguments – not private interests, are assumed to shape those discourses. Collegiality in other words is a working process based on the scientific argument. In this way, the collegium takes responsibility for the development and the quality of research and education (Bennett, 1998).

Challenges to collegiality

The section above, on collegiality in theory and practice indicates some of the challenges to collegiality in Swedish universities of today. We have pointed to a number of reforms of the formal organizing of universities that have weakened the legal support for collegiality. Moreover, universities are mainly organized legally as public agencies, and hence are subject to governance and governance reforms of public agencies more generally. However, while formal structure plays an important role for the possibility to uphold collegiality, we have argued that collegiality should first and foremost be seen as a working process, an aspect of the university culture. As such it needs to be actively supported and maintained. This is not unique to collegial organizational forms, but is true for all kinds of organizational structures. And in line with this much effort is put into supporting management, decision-making and governance.

One striking example of challenges to collegiality concerns leadership training. Our observations of such leadership training courses suggests that they spend very little time and effort on discussing, maintaining and supporting collegiality, but is much more focusing on bureaucratic ideals (Kallinikos, 2004) and management ideals (Meyer & Bromley, 2012). This in turn may be related to the lack of clear definitions and discussions on what collegiality is and what it is for, as we have commented upon above. And as indicated in the introduction to this paper, we also find that collegiality is often described just as bottom up influences, as ways of anchoring decisions through negotiations with various groups of collaborators. In contrast to such a view we emphasize that collegiality forms a specific ideal type of governance, with specific aims and objectives. Moreover, in academic leadership training courses, critique of collegial forms of decision making, organizing and leadership are commonly found. For example, peer review processes have been criticized for being inefficient, biased and too subjective. A similar critique has been expressed regarding faculty boards

etc. Academic leadership, as formed in line with collegiate principles has been criticized for being weak and conservative. We read this critique as a critique of the collegiate practices. However, the critique often spills over on the collegiate principle as such. Again, this observation makes us ask for a more lively discussion on both principles and practices of collegiality. If it is the case that collegial processes do not function as intended or if they are found to be problematic, the conclusion may not be that collegiality – in principle – is problematic. Some of the problems attached to collegial models of leading and organizing may in fact rather be a sign of too little, rather than too much, collegiality (see Sahlin 2012).

Few official documents include definitions and discussions on collegiality while many books written by former deans, rectors, vice-chancellors etc include quite extensive discussions on what collegiality is, how it works in practice and why it is important (Cole 2010, Kennedy 1997, Rosovsky 1997, Russel 1991, Sundqvist 2010). This observation suggest that collegiality is treated as though it is clear what it is, as an institutionalized form of governance, while management is seen as a model that needs much support in terms of training, definitions, strategy documents etc. In contrast, we maintain that no form of governance works exactly according to the ideals, and all forms of governance need to be subject to translations, maintenance activities and to scrutiny and reflection.

The role and task of universities have changed considerably over the years with mass education reaching higher education, the expansion of the university system, new tasks for universities and more socially embedded universities. While collegiality is central to the task of developing and scrutinizing knowledge – in research and teaching – many tasks in current "multiuniversities" go beyond these tasks. Hence, the discussion on collegiality points to the importance of developed reflections on what universities are for (see eg Collini 2012). And it relates to questions concerning the nature of universities as organizations, and the nature of the task and roles of universities. Are universities unique bodies, that require specific forms of governance, or can they producing entities like any kind of public agency or any kind of corporation?

Institutional pluralism

University governance has often been described and analysed in terms of ideal types. One discussion, also clearly featuring in public debates and among reformers, pictures those changes as a shift form

one ideal type of organization and governance (many times described as collegiality or professional dominance) to another (captured as management). This pictured transformation also resembles a change in other kinds of professionally based organizations. Scott and his colleagues have provided such an example. The example is based on their studies of the health care system in the Bay area since 1945. Scott et al (2000) described the governing of this health care system in terms of three institutional eras. They identified quite distinct shifts in how health care was governed, which actors dominated and how organizations were depicted and described. A first era of professional dominance was followed by an era where federal politics came to more clearly frame the system. In the 1980's the system came to be shaped by corporate and management ideals. Even if the eras were marked by clear shifts in which institutional actors, institutional logics and governance structures came to dominate, resource allocation models, notions, regulations and agreements from previous eras continued to exist also when new institutions came to dominate. Hence the system is composed of a shifting constellation of institutional arrangements.

Much research has highlighted the multi-institutional character of universities, largely by referring to typologies of governance and organizing. Burton Clark's (1983) triangle, used to compare the coordination of national university systems, is still a much used reference for this. Clark distinguished between three ideal types of coordination: market, academic oligarchy (also referred to as professional coordination) and state authority (also referred to as political coordination). Again, this research - and many studies following from it - clearly shows a move, largely from collegial dominance to market and management. However, all systems displayed compositions of ideal types of governance and organizing. When having established that universities certainly operate under multiple, and partly competing or contradictory institutions, it appears important to understand the interplay among those institutions. Research on organization and institutions and on organizational and institutional change has recently put much emphasis on such institutional pluralism and multi-institutional compositions (for an overview see Greenwood et al 2011). However, we find that even if these writings point to important features of multi-institutional organizations, there is still a need for a developed analysis of the interplay among the diverse institutions. One kind of interplay, or maybe more accurately described as a lack of interplay among diverse institutions is captured by decoupling,

an analysis that builds on the since long developed analysis of how organizations deal with competing demands (eg Cyert and March 1963, for a recent overview of decoupling see Bromley and Powell 2012). Decoupling is and has certainly been prevalent in universities, and such decoupling appears partly to be a way to keep different, and partly competing institutional setting apart. In organizational terms universities have been organized as a combination of separate academic and administrative hierarchies. In this way, universities have at the same time functioned according to a bureaucratic or administrative logic and according to an academic or collegial logic. The distinction has formed a division between different groups of employees and different tasks of the university.

In terms of ideal types these two logics share some common features, but they are also quite distinct. Both ideal types assume a governance structure aimed at avoiding individual interests to take control. The Weberian ideal bureaucracy was indeed formulated as a way of avoiding personal interests and nepotism to be played out. Instead, the bureaucratic organizations were formed to follow rules and objectives (Kallinikos, 2004). As bureaucratic principles have shaped the ideal public agency, the agency is supposed to follow rules set by the political system. This assumes a system with clear hierarchy, clear roles and a meritocratic basis for recruitment and promotion. The collegial system, as emphasized above is based on scientific arguments and scientific principles, and thus is built to maintain and independence from personal, but also political, interests.

The traditional decoupling in universities of administrative and academic governance is not only a way of decoupling separate and partly competing logics, but also and ideally primarily a way to govern various aspects of university development (as resources are politically controlled, but research and teaching is scientifically based). Moreover, the two systems have functioned as checks and balances in relation to each other, bureaucratic and collegial forms of governance have supplemented each other. However, it is not always possible to keep procedures, activities or groups separated from each. Governance and organizing in current universities appear many times much more integrated and blended than a reasoning in terms of two or three distinct ideal types assume. This is partly shown in the overview above of some of the recent reforms of the Swedish university system. With new public management, corporate principles have changed practices, ideals and presentations of public agencies. This has led to a situation in which bureaucratic and management principles have

become mixed so that political control of universities is nowadays largely introduced through means traditionally analyzed as management ideals – for example the construction of market mechanisms, the allocation of resources based on output etc.

The appointment of leaders is another clear example of how academic, administrative and management principles mix both in the demands on and individual leaders and in how these leaders are appointed. This mix leads to what can be described as institutional ambiguity; it is unclear what requirements, standards and criteria to apply. Such states of institutional ambiguity can, as has been shown in previous research, lead to stalemate or they can open up for unconventional combinations and to new dynamics. In these situations, diverse governance ideals appear as a sort of an unsorted composition of practices and ideals and it is certainly up to local leaders and local groups to find a good mix of procedures. Individual models and procedures are subject to editing; models are translated in relation to each other, and the accounts of governing practices are subject to editing. In this way practices as well as governing practices transform. In order to make sense of current governing ideals and practices we find that more active and structured discussions on what procedures and cultures prevail can open up for new and hopefully productive institutional compositions.

With the introduction of management and corporate ideals into the university sector, the decoupling of collegial and bureaucratic principles has also been undermined. Management and corporate ideals is not just one other ideal type governance that plays out beside the two more traditional ones. Management has been described as the "lingua franca" of current governance (Bromley & Meyer, 2012; Engwall, 2013). While collegiality and bureaucracy are motivated by certain specific objectives and specific prerequisites as described above (with an emphasis on independence from personal interests and meritocratic principles from both models and with efficiency and the rule of law as a main principle for bureaucracy and scientific scrutiny and scientific development as a main principle for collegiality), management models are framed in much more generic terms. Management is presented as a form of governance for everything. For this reason the other ideal types of governance tends to become subordinated specifications or management – sometimes described and treated as exceptions from the more generalized management models. Management principles, and the corporate model is also the one more commonly known. Therefore,

like a lingua franca, it easily turns into the main template and framing through which other modes of governance are understood and shaped (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002).

Concluding remarks

Despite much talk about collegiality, we have noted a lack of principle discussions on what collegiality is, how it can be upheld and why it should play an important part in university governance. We have noted that collegial forms of governance demand activities and procedures directed at upholding a collegial culture and that it is a form of governance which relies on scientific norms and is aimed at basing developments on and for scientific development. This argument leads us to conclude that a developed discussion on how collegiality can be upheld and restored, can lead to more open arguments and practices as to why universities need collegiality. This latter discussion needs to be linked to a discussion on what the roles are for universities in society – what universities are for.

Collegiality does not work on its own and just as is the case with all modes of governance, collegiality cannot remain unchanged as new prerequisites for management come into play, various modes of governance mix and new and revised roles of universities evolve. Our reasoning has lead to what can be described as a paradox of institutional ambiguity. One line of thought that has run through the paper is that collegiality has been undermined, not only through the introduction of more bureaucracy and more management, but also because the practice and knowledge about collegiality is not upheld. This can be described in terms of an institutional ambiguity – it becomes less and less clear what collegiality is, what it is for and how it needs to be maintained and supported. At the same time, we have pointed to an institutional ambiguity of management. Management models spread partly because they are shaped in generic and generalized ways open to translation. Moreover, with the introduction of new public management, political control is pursued with a mix of bureaucratic and management principles. At the same time as corporate and management models have come to dominate much of governance in and of universities, they remain surprisingly imprecise. For example, it remains quite unclear how to define what good academic leadership is from a management perspective. This conclusion suggest that a clarifying discussion on what management principles are, what they are good for and what the limitations are of such principles is as much needed as the discussion of collegiality.

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